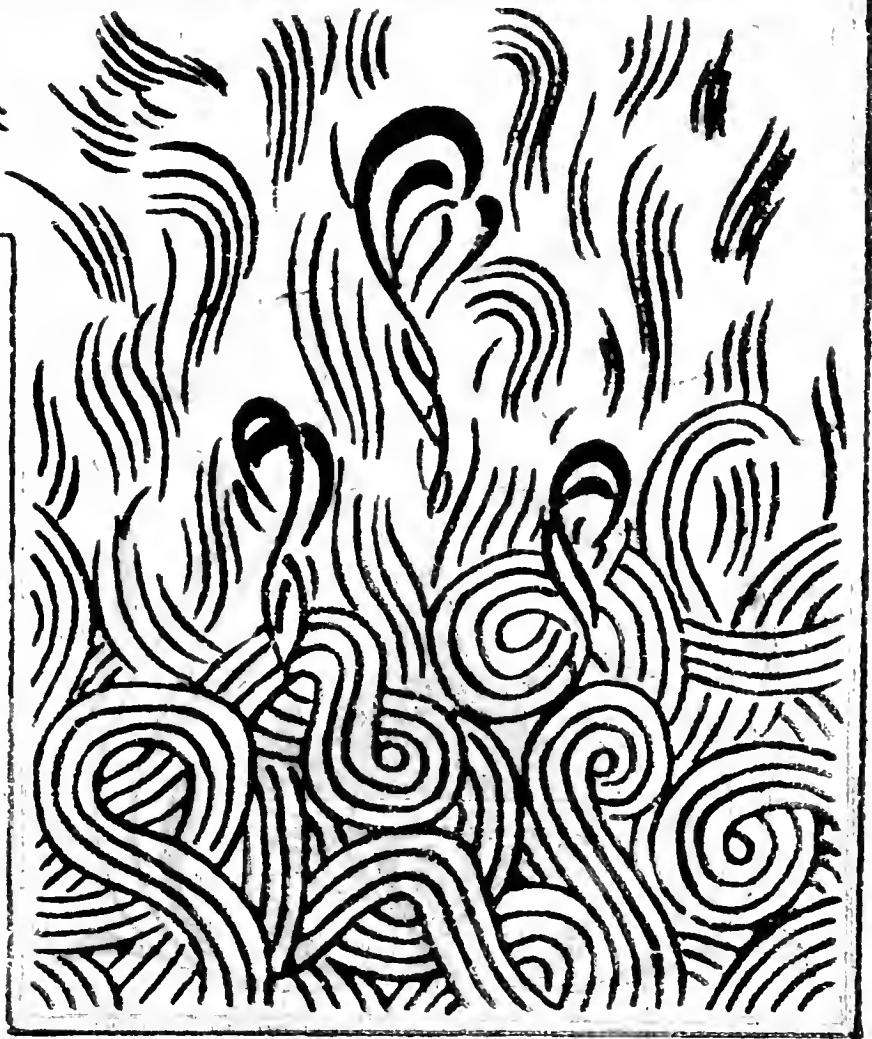




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CHRYSTAL

THE NEWEST OF WOMEN



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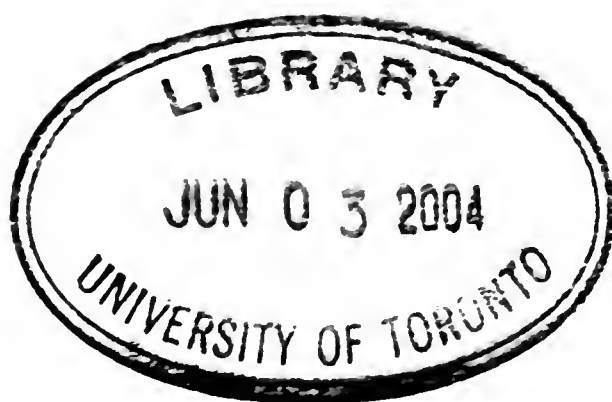
THE NEWEST OF WOMEN

BY
AN EXPONENT

SECOND EDITION

London

18 Bouverie Street, Fleet Street, E.C.



CHRYSTAL

THE NEWEST OF WOMEN

PROLOGUE

I.

“WELL, my dears, I hope you have enjoyed yourselves.”

The speaker was a Mr. Antrobus, living at Merlemere, in the county of Eastshire; and the persons addressed—Sylvia Beresford, aged ten, and Chrystal Beresford, aged seven—were the daughters of a lately-arrived lady neighbour. He had said to his wife, “We ought to show some attention to Mrs. Beresford, so ask her children in to spend the day.” Mrs. Antrobus was not pleased by the idea; but her parents had taught her that “wives should obey their husbands,” and her husband had taught her that “a man likes to be master

in his own house," therefore the invitation was given. Being indolent, however, she soon left Sylvia and Chrystal to their own devices. They were not troublesome children requiring always to be amused; in their own house, they could occupy themselves; but in this strange house, without toys, story-books, or even lessons, they were bored, and wished that it were time to go home. "I would rather be doing my sums in the school-room than stop here doing nothing," mumbled Chrystal, in a tone that Mrs. Antrobus could not overhear. Thus, when Mr. Antrobus returned from his avocations at four o'clock, he found his wife reading a novel, and the little girls standing together at a window.

"So this is Sylvia and Chrystal Beresford," said he, as they came forward, and he shook hands with them in a ponderous manner. "Well, I hope you have been enjoying yourselves." He generally started his sentences by help of the prefix "Well."

The phrase that Mr. Antrobus used did not represent his meaning; he had no doubts upon the subject, consequently there was no room for hope; and he anticipated no

particular pleasure from an assent. He had had a reason for wishing to find these children here, but they themselves were only in his way; he wanted to be alone with his wife, and to talk with her about matters that interested him. But there the guests stood, smiling, and he must say something to them.

It was a grateful circumstance to Mr. Antrobus that custom had provided a form of words for such occasions.

Custom had also provided a form of words for the reply.

"Yes, thank you," said Sylvia, without an instant's hesitancy, while Chrystal was glad that the gentleman had not exactly asked a question.

Feeling that he was getting on pretty well, Mr. Antrobus resumed the laborious conversation. He sat down, and drew the younger child toward his knees.

"And have you enjoyed yourself also, my dear?"

His ear missed the expected sound, for the child blushed and kept silence.

"She is very shy," explained Sylvia.

"Let her alone, Ranald," said his wife,

from the sofa ; “of course she has enjoyed herself.”

But Mr. Antrobus was of opinion that “little girls must always answer when they are spoken to,” for the nursery wisdom of fifty years ago was still wise to him ; big man though he was, he did not outgrow it. So he asked the question again.

And then a wonderful thing happened.

“No,” whispered Chrystal.

Mr. Antrobus sat dumbfounded for a moment. How often in his life had he put this friendly inoffensive query, and the incident had always gone smoothly ; and now this baby had presumed to give the wrong answer, and had rebuffed him ! The absolute newness of the occurrence shocked him, even more than did its unpleasantness ; but when the Old Man meets the New Woman—though she may be a child, and as yet with no intention of being new—the consequences are likely to disconcert both parties. He remembered just then to have heard that children are apt to be unaccountably naughty at times ; and if she had meant this for impudence, he was ready to give her a chance of righting herself.

"What did you say?" he asked pompously.
"I cannot hear you."

But Chrystal had not meant to be impudent, she had only meant to be true. The little voice came louder and clearer:

"I said no."

"Well!" ejaculated the gentleman, as he put her from him and stared at her with a puzzled frown. He would have liked to shake her, and put her into a corner, but she was his guest, therefore he was helpless. There was somebody else in the room, however, to whom he could be as cross as he chose.

"Muriel, this child says she has not enjoyed herself. What is the reason of that? What on earth have you been about?"

"I am sure it is not my fault," his wife protested; "I have done everything I could. It is very ungrateful of them if they have not been happy here." And she flounced upon the sofa, and rustled the pages of her book with a heightened colour.

Mr. Antrobus's gaze returned to Chrystal, still standing a few paces opposite him, and thinking in her heart that his offence was unjust. How was he to close this awkward

scene? He had brought it on by indiscreet pertinacity, but he did not blame himself; he knew that he had been in order, it was the child's course that had been erratic. "What a rude little girl you are!" he thought, in slow astonishment. But then another thought came uppermost. Suppose these children should make complaints to their mother—complaints that they had not been properly entertained? It would spoil the effect he had hoped for by inviting them.

"Well, what is to be done? How am I to make you enjoy yourself?" he demanded, half grumpily, half kindly. For, as he looked at the small person who had so upset him, his masculine nature became aware that she was very attractive; and not defiant, but apparently shamefaced. He could not see her eyes, for she had drooped them, but the curled eyelashes lay on carmine cheeks, and the offending lips were pursed up and made as kissable a little mouth as could be. "Would you like a piece of cake?"

Chrystal nodded, smiled, and edged a step nearer to him.

So the cake was brought, and each child had a slice, and Mr. Antrobus felt that

he had been rather clever as he watched them munch it.

"Well," said he presently, "are you enjoying yourself better now?"

"Yes, thank you," answered Chrystal, with a little skip. Seven-years-old is easily satisfied.

"That's right," said he, rising. "Well, now, Muriel, it is getting dusk ; is it not time for these children to be going home?"

"I am only waiting for their maid. That is her ring, I suppose.—Oh, yes, thank you, the young ladies have been as good as gold. Please tell Mrs. Beresford that, with my kind regards. Good-bye, my dears, good-bye."

"Thank you for a very pleasant day," said Sylvia, returning the lady's kiss, while Chrystal murmured in her turn, "Thank you for the day."

"That is an extraordinary child," said Mrs. Antrobus to her husband, as the hall-door closed on the party ; "I don't like her. But the elder girl is different—so nice."

"Yes," assented Mr. Antrobus, "Sylvia is very correct, as you say ; but the other is the beauty. She will be a handful to manage, one of these days. Well, that is over and

done; we have paid Mrs. Beresford the compliment of asking them, and we need not have them here again."

The sisters started on their walk home. Both had been instructed, "You must always speak the truth;" but only the elder understood what limits were intended; and that, though she had often been punished for telling falsehoods, it was for such falsehoods as were convenient to herself and inconvenient to her elders. She knew there would be no punishment for her untruths of that afternoon. She was not so sure, however, that there would not be any for the truth that Chrystal had spoken.

"Oh, mama," she exclaimed, when they reached their own house, "we have had a horrid day, and Chryssie actually told Mr. Antrobus that she hadn't enjoyed herself!"

"Why—Chrystal?"

"Mama," said the child, "he asked me. I would not have said it, of myself, for the world, but he asked me twice over and made me answer him. So then, of course, I was obliged to say the truth. It was only yesterday you 'sured us we must never tell a lie."

Her large eyes rested confidently on her mother's face.

"My dear, you are so literal," said Mrs. Beresford impatiently. "There, run away; I will make it all right with Mr. and Mrs. Antrobus."

Chrystal departed, and sought her brother, who was older than the two little girls.

"Gervie," she said, "what kind of person is a literal person?"

"What kind? Oh, a literal person believes that everybody says exactly what they mean—no more, no less."

"And don't they?"

"Rather not." And Gervas went off, whistling.

The child sat down and thought. Her mother disapproved of her literalness; she had not intended to be believed; when she said so solemnly, "You are never to tell a lie," she did not mean that; she meant—what? A parent who may not be depended on, a teacher who is best pleased when her teaching is set at naught, a guide to right-doing who reproves the guided for obeying! What a contradictory world it was that she—Chrystal Beresford—had come into! The

mother, the natural helper, was no use, and the little new-comer must grope her way in it alone. This reasoning went through the child's mind, though she did not put it into words ; for children have their own opinions long before they have the corresponding language ; for instance, even a baby of three knows when it is unkindly and unjustly treated, although the words "unkind," "unjust," are not yet in its vocabulary. Inside little Chrystal's round curly head, as she sat there by herself meditating, had begun an experience that was to be often repeated.

The next time Mrs. Beresford met the Antrobuses, she said : "So kind of you, dear Mrs. Antrobus, to invite my little girls."

"We were afraid they found it dull," said the gentleman.

"Oh, not at all ; it was a delightful day for them, I assure you. Sylvia enjoyed herself immensely, but poor Chryssie is so shy that she is happier at home than visiting. She is our home-bird."

But, as a matter of fact, Chrystal Beresford was not shy at all.

II.

IT was the misfortune of this little new woman to be educated on the old lines. She found herself in a world where all girls were expected to feel alike, think alike, and behave alike. A strange world—and she was a stranger in it.

She had been in it only two years, when the discovery was made that she had an antipathy to dolls.

“Take nice dolly, dear; take pretty dolly,” said Mrs. Beresford, putting the artificial baby, with gentle force, into the real baby’s arms, and closing her dimpled fingers upon it. “Little girls always like dollies.”

But the little girl flung the thing from her, screaming until it was removed. Mother and nurse wondered at, and were offended at, this behaviour; it was such a wilful departure from the routine of child-life. They had supposed they knew all about children, and when this two-year-old contradicted their axioms by opposing the spontaneous to the

conventional, they thought the child herself must be unnatural.

Sylvia and Chrystal Beresford were, in ordinary parlance, "nicely brought-up children," the real meaning of which is that they were brought up with nicety. They lived in an atmosphere of rule, pretence, and formula.

"Thank God for my good dinner," must be said every day, even if the pudding had been a failure and Chryssie had rebelled against eating it. Their repentances were dictated to them also; "I am very sorry, and I will never do it again," was the phrase for that. When they went to children's parties, they were not allowed to come away without saying, "Thank you for a pleasant evening;" and however naughtily Chryssie had behaved, from the hostess's point of view, she was always dismissed with the same verbal label as her sister—"Both the children have been as good as gold."

Chrystal did not enjoy these parties. She used to leave the little girls' group, and romp in the middle of the floor with the little boys, until their noise became too noisy, when she was dragged back by some elder and given to

understand that she had misbehaved herself ; then she passed the remainder of the evening under a sense of disapproval. When the leave-takings began, Sylvia went through her part of the performance with a pretty air of sincerity that was invariable ; and Chrystal, following behind, mumbled " Thank you for the evening," her omission of the adjective being smiled at as an evidence of shyness.

Mother of three children who were very unlike each other, Mrs. Beresford endeavoured to feel no favouritism. " I love Gervie best because he is the eldest, and Chryssie best because she is the youngest, and Sylvie best because she is the middle one," she would say playfully, when they questioned her. But only Sylvia was hers mentally and morally, and so like her besides in fragile graceful prettiness that their friends called the girl " little mama." Gervas was a tall comely boy, intensely proud of his sex, with a protective tolerance for his mother, and a good-natured contempt for his sisters. Chrystal did not seem to be the right kind of child ; she did not like games that were called feminine, but was an adept at running with a hoop and

spinning tops ; her mother, her nurse, and her governess nicknamed her "Hoyden," but she was "only a girl" to Gervas.

There was one house in Merlemere, however, which Chrystal delighted to visit, where she was always welcome, and where her hoydenish qualities were especially prized and encouraged. This was Stackstead Grange, inhabited by Mrs. Yorke and her only son. The little owner was delicate, not able to hold his own in games against boys, yet disdaining girlish games ; and Chrystal Beresford—who was not a boy but could behave like one, who could climb trees, whistle and shout, play marbles and leap-frog, and could do these things better than he could, who was about his own age, and such a pretty little girl besides—was the very play-mate for him. Her animal spirits cheered him ; her chatter interested him ; her eyes and curls and rosiness attracted him. He was her comrade in some things, her pupil in some things, and her admirer always.

"What good luck it is that the Beresfords came here !" exclaimed Peregrine, one day, turning from the window, whence he had watched her rushing down the avenue home-

wards. "Now you need never send me to school, mother ; I can have a tutor at home. I don't want any other companions, I care for nobody else as long as I have Chrystal and you."

Mrs. Yorke begged Mrs. Beresford to let her come often—to let her run in every day, if possible. And Chrystal was happy in the arrangement ; and, on taking leave, would lift a loving face to Mrs. Yorke's, give her an emphatic kiss, and say "Thank you for such a nice time !" with all the heart and energy of her little voice. Stackstead Grange was more to her than a home ; it was the one house where she could be natural.

III.

THERE are certain questions which girls ask naturally, at various intervals ; and they ask their mother as their nearest friend.

The first question is always at an early age.

"Mama, where do little babies come from ?"

"The doctor brings them, dear."

"Oh! And where does the doctor get them from?"

"He finds them under the gooseberry-bushes."

The statement was accepted in simple faith; and Sylvia and Chrystal ran into the garden and searched among the gooseberry-bushes, to try if they could be as lucky as the doctor. Meanwhile, the question of where the babies had come from when found by the doctor under the gooseberry-bushes remained unasked and unanswered.

From that day forward, as Sylvia and Chrystal evolved out of childhood into girlhood, out of girlhood into womanhood, no help or true information came from the mother—only fiction, mystery, and blame for trenching on "improper subjects."

They had the usual religious instruction.

They were required to say, "my vile body."

"It isn't a vile body," said little Chrystal, then about six years old; "it is a very nice body."

"Made of clay," pursued her instructress.

"'Tisn't made of clay, or of dust either," declared Chryssie, more offendedly; "it is

made of flesh and blood. See, here is the flesh"—pointing to her roseate downy cheek ; "and if I prick it, it bleeds."

She resisted these lies, as well she might. But she was chidden for contradicting the Bible, and the lying instruction went on. Taught to value truth yet trained to speak falsehood, for this new little woman there was only a child's refuge—silence.

The Lord's Prayer was almost the earliest lesson that Sylvia and Chrystal had to learn. They learned it by memory (often erroneously called "by heart") at an age when they could not understand a word of it, and when their babyish mispronunciation reduced it to utter gibberish. Year after year, they repeated the prayer without heed. But there comes a time when the meaning of set phrases reveals itself, gradually or vividly, to the person on whose tongue they recur ; and such a time came to Chrystal, in church, one morning. "Lead us not into temptation," she prayed aloud, and suddenly stopped. After service, she singled out her brother and walked home with him.

"Gervie," she said, trotting along beside the tall lad, and looking up at his face, "do you

know what we did just now, in church? We asked God not to lead us into temptation. *Would* God do such a mean, wicked thing?"

Gervas drew in his lips, in anticipation of some funny originality from his small sister.

"Of course He would, little 'un ; or there is no meaning in the sentence."

Chrystal drew herself up as proudly as she could, considering that she was only nine years old, and had to keep pace with his longer strides. And she spoke with perilously clear deliberation.

"Then, I don't want to pray to Him ever again. I am better than He is. I would scorn to treat anyone so !"

"You had better not let mother hear you," chuckled Gervas, putting his hands in his pockets, and capering in huge enjoyment of the imagined catastrophe.

The tastes of the two sisters diverged more as they grew older. Chrystal read a good deal for her amusement, while Sylvia, less intelligent, spent her leisure in doing fancy-needlework. Chrystal's reading brought a quantity of new information and unaccustomed ideas into her mind ; the information

needed enlarging, the ideas often needed explaining; and Mrs. Yorke, of Stackstead Grange, was her most sympathetic referee.

Chrystal was eleven years old when she startled her friend, one day, by saying:

"Mrs. Yorke, is there any harm in being a love-child?"

"A love-child? What a dreadful expression to use, Chryssie! Where did you pick it up?"

"I heard Joanna, our parlour-maid, say it, this morning; I had never heard the word before; and so I told her that was what I should like to be—a love-child. But she turned quite scarlet, and said it was a horrible thing to be, and that everybody despised such a child. *I* would not despise it. She told me the word meant a child whose parents were wicked, and so it was disgraced, and many people would even treat it cruelly. It cannot be right," continued Chrystal thoughtfully, "to make a child suffer because its father and mother have done wrong."

As Chrystal's words came to her ears, other words came inappropriately into Mrs

Yorke's mind—"I visit the sins of the fathers upon the children, unto the third and fourth generation." That vague phrase had been made sacred to her; yet the girl's clear assertion, spoken in a fresh young serious voice, and traversing its morality with such directness, went straight to the woman's heart and entered there. She did not dare to contradict it. Her judgment and her conscience would not let her.

"But what does the word itself mean?"

"What do you suppose it to mean, Chryssie?"

Chrystal paused and smiled.

"A love-child, I should think, would be a child whose parents love it very much, and whose parents love each other very much. That must be a very happy child, even though all the rest of the world were against it."

"The word means more than that, dear. It means a child whose parents have never been married to each other."

"Is that all? And 'paramour,' Mrs. Yorke—I met with that word in one of Sir Walter Scott's novels—the paramours are the father and mother of the love-child,

are they not? What does that word really mean?"

Mrs. Yorke's policy of ignoring was not as rigid as Mrs. Beresford's. She answered the enquiry.

"Paramour is French, from two words pronounced *par amour*, which means 'by love.'"

"Ah, that is nice!" said Chrystal, clasping her hands in her lap, with a bright smile on her rounded face. "When I grow up, I should like to have a par-amour and a love-child."

But the lady's face quickly became crimson.

"My dear, my dear, you do not understand what you are saying. Oh, Chryssie, you horrifying girl, you almost make me laugh!" she added hysterically. And then, more soberly—"Such a man and woman as you speak of have no right to have a child; they are not husband and wife."

"Does that matter? if they love each other?"

"It matters everything. Love between father and mother and child is very good—yes—but love is not enough, it is not even the principal thing; there must be law also.

The man and woman must go through the marriage-ceremony in church, or at the registrar's office, or else their infant is base-born and they are shamed."

"A ceremony," repeated Chrystal slowly. "Does that make so much difference between the right and the wrong?"

"Yes, it makes all the difference. There you sit, my dear, in your white frock, looking so sweet! But the wish that you ignorantly and innocently formed is a wicked wish; you have wished to commit the very greatest sin a woman can commit. The action is so disgraceful that it should not even be talked about. And really, Chryssie, it is fortunate that nobody heard you but myself," added Mrs. Yorke, in a lighter tone, wiping her eyes into which laughter and emotion had brought the tears. "Never use those expressions again, dear; they soil your pretty mouth in uttering them. But since you were to make that awful remark, it was better you should make it quite alone with me."

She patted the girl's shoulder, and closed the conversation with a kiss.

Chrystal remained thoughtful all that day. Love is not enough—law is more important

—this was the exalting of the conventional above the real. A strange world truly, where reality counted for so little, and conventionality for so much ; for were there not Lord and Lady Hautayne, up at the Castle, whose quarrels were notorious, and yet nobody thought scorn of them for living together and having a baby. All children ought to be love-children ; all parents ought to be parents *par amour* ; but this world, where law was indispensable and love was not, offered instead the terms “legitimate child” and “husband,” which had such inferior meanings. Those beautiful words, “par-amour” and “love-child,” were invented hundreds of years ago, not for approval but reproach, not for admiration but for loathing. Society, then as now, called them foul and cast them out. Despised and rejected of men though they were, Chrystal Beresford gathered them into her heart.

IV.

CHRYSTAL'S double life at Merlemere continued year by year. She had two homes—Ivy Chimneys and Stackstead Grange. The one house was situated in the village, of moderate size, with a garden, having a sleepy air of comfort and old fashion; here she dwelt with her family. The other house, immensely larger, stood outside the village, surrounded by ancestral trees, and having a grand and exquisite appearance of spacious perfection; here she spent the greater part of each day. At home, she was counselled to subdue her voice, compose her limbs, and speak according to rule; from home, her activity was stimulated and her originality appreciated. It was a double life she led, and the two lives contrasted.

What would she have done without the Yorkes? And what would Peregrine have done without her? Mrs. Beresford did not care to keep a pony for her; but in the Grange stables she had her own pony Chirrup, a roan, bought by Mrs. Yorke on

one of her birthdays and given to her with affectionate generosity. The thin pale boy and his robust companion rode together, with two dark-spotted carriage dogs bounding along in their company; they skated together; and when the two families went to the seaside, they paddled in the sea together, while Sylvia picked up shells; and when too old for paddling in the sea, they rowed a boat together. Chrystal grew into a large girl, healthful and alive, with a sound nervous system. But Peregrine was pale and thin.

Mrs. Yorke loved Chrystal as a daughter. She hoped to see her become her daughter-in-law.

"What do you suppose that we were born into the world for?" asked a voice, one day, in the schoolroom at Ivy Chimneys.

The voice, of course, was Chrystal's, and her sister and brother were the audience, Gervas happening to be at home for the vacation. She was fourteen years old now, and busied with a question that has busied every thinking mind. Seated in a low chair, she looked up at her sister, standing near and twining one of her flaxen curls round her finger.

"To live," replied Sylvia heedlessly.

"To live, of course ; but how ?"

"As we do live—to eat and drink, and dress, and go to parties when we can; and improve our minds, and do our duty."

"But my duty depends upon what I was born for, and you have not told me that."

"Oh, I don't know. How queer you are !"

"Gervas ?"

"Social custom," said the youth sententially, but with twinkling eyes, "gives a doll to the girl and a toy-sword to the boy; therefore I conclude society intends to hint that women are born to bring people into the world, and that men are born to send them out of it again. I have taken the hint, and I am going into the army." Then he crossed to where his sister sat, and chucked her under the chin. "Eh, Chryst? How will that do for an answer ?"

"It will not do," laughed Chrystal, shaking her head. "Filling the world on purpose to empty it again brings the matter 'no forrader.'"

"Then, enquire of our elders and betters, our pastors and masters."

So she asked her clergyman, and he told

her that she was born to further the glory of God, and suggested to her to begin by teaching in the Sunday-school. Then she asked her mother, who told her there was no particular purpose for her existence ; that she had only to be a good girl, content herself with whatever happened, and live as long as she could. Finally she asked Mrs. Yorke, who explained to her, with some delicate hesitation, that she might hope to have a husband and babies of her own.

"Babies," repeated Chrystal musingly. "Is that the end, the very end, of my having come into the world?"

"Yes. That is the ultimate object of a woman's life. You cannot understand this yet, my dear, you are too young ; but, believe me, to be a mother is the crown of our womanhood."

And what preparation was Mrs. Beresford making for this destiny of her daughters, which came nearer every year? She was trying to keep them absolutely passive ; and, that they might be passive, they must be ignorant. Ignorant they were accordingly ; for, though Chryssie had avowed her preference for a love-child over a merely legitimate

child, when only eleven years old, she had then no more understanding of the actual subject than little children of both sexes have when they chatter about getting married. Mrs. Beresford made a boast of her daughters' ignorance, but when the inevitable result showed itself in their speech she was annoyed.

One day, when Chrystal was sixteen years of age, an awkward incident happened. An afternoon tea-party was taking place at Ivy Chimneys, and the conversation turned upon a Mr. and Mrs. Ingoldsby, who were acquaintances of all present. Their youngest child was mentioned.

"Haven't they had any since Bernard was born?" Chrystal chanced to ask.

Mrs. Beresford coloured, but assumed her company smile.

"My dear, no. Do you not remember that Mr. Ingoldsby has been in India ever since, and Mrs. Ingoldsby in England?"

"Would that prevent it?" asked Chrystal wonderingly, and was abashed to find the eyes of the whole party upon her in scandalised astonishment.

Everybody smiled odd smiles, and became

red more or less ; Gervas uttered an impatient exclamation, and walked to the window ; and Mrs. Beresford's little laugh could not cover her annoyance.

"My dear, you are talking nonsense," she said blandly. "You had better leave us to converse together."

Chrystal was glad to do so, comprehending that she had made some shocking mistake. She left the room, and walked up and down in another, hot and angry with her mother.

"She ought to have explained things to me. What is one's mother for, if not to help one in this way ? She ought not to have let me put myself into that position. And who but she has led me into it ?"

Mrs. Beresford resumed the entertaining of her guests with a curious blend of embarrassment and triumph in her manner. The triumph meant, "See how pure I have kept my daughters !" The embarrassment meant, "Please don't think her a very blundering girl."

"Mother," said Gervas angrily, when the visitors were gone, "what could have induced Chryssie to make such a fool of herself ?"

"Oh, my dear, your sisters are as ignorant

as infants. I tell them nothing; I never let them read the newspapers. That is the system with all nicely brought-up girls."

"It makes them both say very awkward things," grumbled Gervas. "Sylvia does the same. I heard her ask the meaning of an awful word once — a really awful word, mother; I had to tread upon her foot to stop her."

"Oh, my dear!" said Mrs. Beresford, crimsoning. "Yes, it does become inconvenient sometimes. I was ashamed of Chrystal this afternoon. And before gentlemen too!"

"But are you not the person to teach her, mother?"

Mrs. Beresford smiled a superior smile.

"My dear boy, you do not understand the bringing-up of girls. Leave that to me. When you have a wife," she added playfully, "she will bring up your daughters in the same way."

"I hope she won't. I hope she will have more sense in her head," muttered Gervas unfilially. And he lighted a cigar to soothe himself back to equanimity.

Mrs. Beresford betook herself into the

presence of her daughter. Chrystal stood up on her entrance, knowing that she was to be scolded; and woman and girl faced each other, vexation in the elder's mind, and a hurt resentment in the younger's.

"Chrystal, I am very much displeased with you—making such a maladroit remark just now. At your age!"

"But how was I to know if you did not tell me, mother?"

Mrs. Beresford gasped at this sensible question.

"Do you really say," she began, slowly trying to realise a blank state of ignorance which she had endeavoured to create, "that you did not understand better than that? Did you suppose—What did you suppose?" she broke off to ask. "I should really like to know how much you do understand of these things." And she gave the little laugh that Chrystal especially disliked.

She was ready to blame her equally for knowing and for not knowing.

Mrs. Beresford's last phrase was merely speculative; but the words themselves were an assertion, and her tone was an interrogation. Chrystal, the literal, felt called upon to answer.

"I know one thing," she said, with an effort; "I know where babies come from. It says in the Bible, 'The babe leaped in his mother's womb.'"

Mrs. Beresford started. Yet she herself had placed the Bible in the girl's hands many years before; had assured her it was the best book that ever was written—every word of it precious and holy; had bidden her peruse it through and through; and had taken her regularly to church, where she heard it read out to a congregation of both sexes and all ages. She shuddered at what quotations might be coming next, but Chrystal said no more.

"But about the Ingoldsbys," said Mrs. Beresford, after a pause. "Did you suppose that when a married woman has once had a child by her husband, she was liable to go on having children—her husband's children—even if she did not see him again for years? Like a clock which is warranted to strike the hours when once wound up?" Again the contemptuous little laugh. "Though even a clock needs re-winding," added Mrs. Beresford, becoming aware of the inadequacy of her simile.

"Yes, mother, that was what I thought."

"And what could have made you take up such a ridiculous idea?"

"I believed it," answered Chrystal, with an air of dignity that contrasted with her mother's flippant agitation, "because you have always said that children are sent into the world by God. I believed you, mother. When the Latimers, who are so poor with ten children already, had a new baby the other day, you spoke of it as a misfortune. How was I to imagine, then, that they had had any choice in the matter? I thought they could not help it."

"You are so literal," exclaimed Mrs. Beresford.

"I believed you," repeated Chrystal proudly. "I shall not believe again."

Mrs. Beresford condemned herself when she reproached her daughter for being literal. Chrystal had taken her as a guide, but if the guide did not mean what she said, the guidance was harmful. Was it fair to keep her ignorant, to mislead her even, and then to laugh at her or be angry with her because she did not know?

V.

"YOU will not be dull, mama, while I am away?" said Sylvia, bending over her mother with pretty solicitude.

"No, my love; go for your drive with Lady Hautayne. I shall occupy myself with letter-writing, by proxy," smiled Mrs. Beresford. "I am too poorly to do it with my own hand"—drawing her shawl round her, and shivering by the fire.

She had taken a severe cold.

The Castle carriage drove off with the countess and Miss Beresford inside it.

"Now, Chrystal dear, I want you to write to Mr. Armitage for me. Though seventeen years old, you have never written a grown-up letter to any gentleman. It is time my Chrystal learned to practise the amenities of social life," said Mrs. Beresford complacently.

So the young lady took her place at a davenport, and sat with the pen in her hand, waiting for tuition.

"I will tell what I want said, and you must write it in your own name, in your own words,

and make as presentable a letter of it as possible. Then show it to me before it is posted."

Mrs. Beresford explained the intention of the note, and Chrystal listened. Her first action was to select an envelope.

"How am I to address it? 'Mr. Armitage'?"

"Dear me, no. 'Norman Armitage, Esq.'"

"He is not a squire," said Chrystal. "He has no land. He is a surgeon, a doctor. However—there it is! And now for the letter. How shall I begin?"

"'My dear Mr. Armitage.'"

"Oh, no," said Chrystal impulsively, but laughingly; "I cannot write that."

"Why not? You know him. Would you put 'My dear sir'? That would be very formal."

"No, it is the two first words I object to. He is not mine at all, and he is not dear to me. Both those words are false."

"Chrystal, nonsense! Write it down at once! You would like to begin, 'Mr. Armitage,' I suppose, and insult him," continued Mrs. Beresford, calming as her daughter wrote.

"It looks so strange," commented Chrystal, surveying the words she had written. "It makes me blush to look at it."

"What an owl you are!" said her mother pettishly. "The expression is quite meaningless."

"That does not recommend it to me. Such words are too good to be used meaninglessly; they ought only to be used when they are true."

Silence followed, and the letter progressed uninterruptedly to its close. Then:

"How am I to sign myself?" asked the girl.

"'Yours truly;' or, if you like to be rather more cordial, you can put 'Yours very sincerely.'"

"Oh, mother! But I am not his at all. Therefore, if I put 'Yours,' I ought to add 'untruly.'"

"I don't know what to make of you!" said Mrs. Beresford, in an irritable voice. "If what I have dictated is too warm for your prudishness, what do you want to choose instead? 'Yours obediently'?"

"No. I would not sign myself 'obediently' to any man; nor to any woman either, except my mother."

"I am obliged to you," laughed Mrs. Beresford. "I should be very much offended if you did."

These two could not meet on common mental ground, because one was seeking the real and the other was adhering to the customary.

Chrystal still sat pen in hand.

"Well, how is this note to be ended?" enquired the lady. "Or is Mr. Armitage never to have it? Shall I be obliged to write one myself?"

"He and I are not engaged," the girl deliberated. "We are not even friends, we are only acquaintances. Let me sign myself, 'Your acquaintance, Chrystal Beresford.'"

"Chrystal, you are impossible—quite impossible!" said Mrs. Beresford, with temper. She was of the ancient opinion that sons and daughters—especially daughters—should tread in the footsteps of their parents. "Why do you say the things that Sylvia never says?"

Chrystal scribbled the dictated signature, rose from her chair, and stretched both her arms upwards.

"Oh, mother dear," she said, with answering

temper in her raillery, "why is there ever any new person? Why are not all young people puppets, to be pulled by strings by their elders?"

Stretching herself with a vigorous yet graceful gesture, Chrystal Beresford's flushed face and the splendid promise of her figure might have made a mother proud. But little Mrs. Beresford disliked the individuality of this farouche daughter of hers. She dreaded to cope with it, even when, as in the present instance, she succeeded.

"You are impertinent and undutiful," she replied coldly. "Leave the room, if you please."

But, literally speaking, Chrystal had not been impertinent. She had been very pertinent.

A few minutes later, Peregrine Yorke said to Mrs. Yorke:

"Here comes Chryssie, tearing along up the avenue. I wonder what she has got to say now?"

And he sat up erectly in his chair and looked pleased. Chrystal was the delightful excitement of his life.

Mrs. Yorke had been playing the piano;

she took her hands off the keys, and waited. Presently, Chrystal burst in upon them, and stood, giving an animated account of the scene at Ivy Chimneys to Mrs. Yorke, while Peregrine sat sniggering behind his newspaper.

"Won't you sit down, dear? You are quite out of breath."

"I cannot make my mind sit down. No, I will stand. Why are there such contradictions in life?" questioned the girl. "If I were to say 'My dear' to Mr. Armitage, mother would tell me I had behaved disgracefully, and yet she obliges me to write it!"

"But," said Peregrine, laying down his paper, "you always write 'My dear' to me."

"Yes, because you are just that. You are my dear Perry. I say it as well as write it to you, and mother does not mind. But she wants Sylvia and me to be prim with gentlemen, and with Mr. Armitage among the others; and then she makes me sign myself his—and not only his, but his truly. We do not belong to each other."

"There is no other way," came from Mrs. Yorke.

"Left to myself," said Chrystal, "I would have begun with 'Mr. Armitage,' and have ended with 'Chrystal Beresford.' He would be offended, says my mother. Why should he be offended? What is there offensive in his own name and in my name? At most, I would have put 'Your acquaintance.' That is what I am. Why should he require me to write that he is mine and I am his?—assertions so contrary to the decrees of our society, that they have been excused to me only by their utter falseness! Oh," cried Chrystal vehemently, "how I wish the world were full of different people—of old and middle-aged who would shake themselves clear of all false and inconsistent customs, and of young who would refuse to adopt any! Then we should have truth, then we should have freedom!"

She paused, and laughed a short laugh of reaction.

"Mother always upsets me," she said apologetically, "and so I come to you, dear Mrs. Yorke, and to you, Perry,"—holding out a friendly hand to each—"and then I feel better."

Mrs. Yorke stepped forward—a fair-sized woman, her garments trailing behind her;

she took the glowing face within both hands, and laid her lips lovingly on Chrystal's. And Peregrine, as he watched them embrace, felt a passing uncomfortableness that was quite new to him.

END OF THE PROLOGUE

CHAPTER I.

THE singing of birds, the singing of birds! The time for the plentiful singing of birds has come! And Chrystal Beresford is twenty!

It was the morning of Chrystal's birthday. That morning, two seasons met, and newness of spring mingled with warmth of summer. Merlemere lay aglow in the sunshine, athrob with the stirring of life; all sentient things were vivified, birds sang in ecstasy, and hearts were gladdened by the meeting of the seasons, by the greenness of the spring and the hot joy of the summer.

At Stackstead Grange, the Yorkes were breakfasting with windows open to the sun and air. The trees on their lawns were

ancestral trees, but not ancestral in the Yorke family ; only Peregrine had been born at the Grange, for Mrs. Yorke came there in her widow's weeds, and he was a posthumous child. The home of his ancestors, in North-umberland, was still let, and Peregrine had never seen it. Mrs. Yorke hoped to see him established in it before her death ; but that depended upon Chrystal, and upon something else in the future.

The intimacy between Ivy Chimneys and Stackstead Grange had never intermitted. Chrystal was daily with the Yorkes. "Oh, I love her," Peregrine had said readily, at all ages ; "she is so"—and then had followed many appreciative adjectives. But latterly, quite latterly, he had become taciturn, and he did not tell his mother that he loved Chrystal.

The young man felt more than fondness now, he felt desire ; the animal was waking in him, weakling though he was. This morning, he looked very unwell : he had not slept for several nights ; he was sallow, furtive, and captious. His mother knew the signs ; she knew that his intercourse with Chrystal Beresford must be altered, or must cease

altogether. Therefore she was almost as nervous as he on this brilliant First of June.

"Any breakfast for me?" said a voice archly—a voice crystal-clear but not crystal-hard. And the girl they were both thinking of stepped in through the low window.

The party was complete now; it never seemed complete without her. She sat down at the round table, at Mrs. Yorke's right hand, opposite to Peregrine, and her friend gave her coffee and delicious viands. Mrs. Yorke's composure had returned, but the young man's nervousness increased. Chrystal was looking cool and fresh in a mauve muslin gown, yet aflush with beauty, charm, and buoyancy. Mrs. Yorke noticed all this lingeringly; and Peregrine was aware of it too, though the confusion in his temperament was great.

"I met old Mr. Antrobus," chatted Chrystal. "'Good morning, young lady,' said he, '—the young lady who did not enjoy herself in my house, and who told me so!' He has a wondrous capability of saying the same things over and over again, and that is his usual greeting to me. 'Because you asked me,'

I reply sometimes. 'You should not have been so pertinacious. But I have enjoyed myself several times since at your house, and have not omitted to tell you so!' But he only shakes his head at me rebukingly. He will go on repeating that until he drops into the grave, and will never quite know whether it is still a complaint or has become only a joke!"

A little silence followed this merrily-told anecdote. Chrystal fingered an opal and ruby locket which Peregrine had presented when she came in, then directed her dark-grey eyes upon her intimate companion, who sat crumbling a piece of bread without looking up.

"Well, Perry, I am not far behind you. This is my twentieth birthday, and your twenty-first birthday will be in another month. I am only a year younger. How nice it is that your coming of age is to take place here! What doings we will have! We shall all drink your health; and is your speech of thanks prepared yet?"

"No," was all that Peregrine could say.

"It will be difficult to invent anything

new," smiled Chrystal, "almost as difficult as in making a proposal of marriage. But you will have to do that too when the time comes—and the lady. Oh, how I should like to hear an offer made! Have you ever heard one?"

"Peregrine could not hear one unless he were making it himself," observed Mrs. Yorke.

"Oh, of course. How stupid of me! Well, have you ever made one, Perry?"

She bent forward towards him, leaning on the table.

A perspiration broke out upon the young man's forehead, and he sat colouring and fidgeting with his piece of bread.

"I think I can safely assert that Peregrine never has," interposed his mother, with a smile.

"Mrs. Yorke," said Chrystal, turning round in her chair as that lady rose to quit the room, "are you thinking me very rude?"

"Dear girl, no," answered Mrs. Yorke, laying a kindly hand upon her shoulder. "You can always say what you please to my son. You are one of us, my Chrystal."

"My son"—the serious words steadied

Chrystal for a moment. Peregrine and she were not boy and girl, or youth and maid, they were young man and young woman. Idly her mind added the phrases, without her own volition, "My son and his fiancée," "My son and his wife." She blushed an angry blush, and started up.

Mrs. Yorke paced the Stackstead library in strong agitation.

What would this house have been, all these years, but for Chrystal? From their early age—when her "Come along, Perry," would draw him into the open air to feed the rabbits, fly kites, or pelt and be pelted with snowballs—through the time of their lesson-learning, when she used to urge him to keep up with her, because it was "so nice" for them to know the same things—on to the present period, when she was developing more beauty every day, and often dressed herself in mauve because he said he liked it—it was she, she who had kept Peregrine happy, occupied, and content with his own home. Without some such attraction, he would have moped, become restless, must have been sent to school, might have gone away to travel. It was she who had preserved him to his mother. And Mrs.

Yorke had been generous to her for her sake, but more for the boy's sake. If Chrystal refused him now, he would never marry, never carry on the name, never hand down the estates in a direct line. There would be no grandchildren in the Grange nurseries. He could not go back to the ancestral home in far Northumberland. She wanted the girl's vitality and sweetness for her son. Oh, if Chrystal should refuse him! She tightened her hands together as she walked up and down, and felt that she would hate her then.

"The heat is suffocating here," said Peregrine, rising. He wiped his forehead. "Let us go to the shady end of the room."

The young people turned from the breakfast-table, where the sun shone so brilliantly, and walked down the long apartment—Chrystal in front. Peregrine placed himself in shade, sitting on a chair and leaning his elbow upon a table near. But Chrystal seated herself on the bar of a low iron ornamental railing that crossed the open window; he had a background of bookcases, she had a background of blue sky; the sunshine—the wonderful sunshine—irradiated her nut-brown

hair as she sat, half-balancing half-supporting her weight, with one foot touching the floor and the other gently swinging. She was actively inclined, this hot fresh First of June. Peregrine shaded his eyes with his hand and looked at her. Young as spring, warm as summer—sweet girl, ripe woman—she was there for him to ask.

The mood of buoyant fun came into her again.

“The proposal-speech will be worse to make than the speech on your coming-of-age day,” she said teasingly, and looking straight at him with laughing eyes. “It will be terrible. And, very likely, the lady herself could have made it much better than you will! Why do men cling to that privilege so, since practically they do not enjoy it?”

Peregrine did not speak. But she was accustomed to his recurring lassitude, and ready to do most of the talking herself. She had observed nothing peculiar about her late playfellow.

“Let me help you, Perry, when the time comes. I will compose a capital one, and write it out, and you shall learn it. Then

you must let me stand behind the door while you deliver it, and I can prompt you if you bungle and break down."

Still no reply from Peregrine.

Chrystal began to laugh a rippling laugh of enjoyment and amusement. It was too provocative, and he was beside her in an instant, with shaking limbs and heated veins, speaking.

The speech occupied three or four minutes, beginning with love and ending with pin-money and the entire refurnishing of the Grange.

Chrystal had heard the words for a minute or two before she realised their import. He was speaking to her quite differently from usual; he was stuttering and stumbling; it was—yes, it was a real offer of marriage! And while he spoke, an accompaniment of remarks flashed silently through the girl's mind.

"Don't talk in that unpleasant way, Perry; I don't like it. How shall I make him leave off? Yes, it is a very silly scene; and men do do it badly—or one man does. I could do it much better myself. He wants to share everything he has with me—a birthday

present indeed! And this grand place will be mine, which of course it never has been yet, nor could have been, though they have made me feel it so. And I do want to be independent—I do. And I am fond of Peregrine; I used to kiss him often, I should not mind kissing him again. No, there is no repugnance. And I love Mrs. Yorke. If I refuse, my life will dwindle down—unless I get another offer—which perhaps I never may.”

All this she said to herself. But, to Peregrine Yorke, she said never a word.

She sat with her hands clasped on her knees, and listened intently as he stumbled and stuttered; it was the same intent look with which, in years past, she had heard him rehearse a lesson, watching to detect if he made any mistake. He stood at her side, bending over her; his hands wandered above her hands, near them, upon them; hers were strong and warm as usual, but his felt trembling and damp. And in the distance, at the further end of the room, could be seen the round breakfast-table, with its shining damask cloth, glittering silver, and gay china, its remnants of veal-pie, toast,

marmalade, and strawberries, all in the blaze of the sun, and the napkin that Peregrine had let fall lay still on the carpet close to his chair.

"Oh, Chryssie, I want you, I crave you!" said Peregrine fretfully. "Won't you say something?"

"And he wants an answer. And the footman will be coming in directly to clear the breakfast-things away. But I will not be hurried so."

"Have you never wished to be married, Chryssie?"

"Yes, but you are not the man."

Again it was to herself that she spoke—not to him.

"Oh, Chryssie, don't keep me waiting!"

"It is absurd," she protested slowly, and aloud, "that I am to decide my whole future in such haste because you are expecting Kenneth to come into the room every minute. I must go home and think it over. You are not to follow, Peregrine, until I send you word."

When she began to speak, he drew apart from her a little, facing her. The window was behind her. So she got up, put one foot

on the bar, jumped down into the garden, and ran off.

How the birds sang! How hot it was!
But Peregrine felt chilly.

CHAPTER II.

MRS. BERESFORD was glad to be told that Peregrine Yorke had proposed. It was what she had been looking forward to for about ten years, and what the neighbourhood had been expecting also. There was no eligible husband for Sylvia in Merlemere, therefore she had taken her to London for the last two seasons; but not Chrystal; it was wiser, for all reasons, to leave her with Mrs. Yorke.

“Never lay yourself out to attract any man,” Mrs. Beresford had said to Sylvia. “Gentlemen like retiring girls. They will flirt with the others, and pay them an extravagant amount of attention; but they do not respect them, they will not propose to them and marry them.” But Sylvia had seen one flirting young lady after another “go off” into

matrimony, while she was left. So, this season, she contrived differently, and was now engaged to a baronet.

Day after day went by, and Chrystal could not make up her mind. She had a wealth of love to give, but Peregrine Yorke was not the man. No, but he was the man who had asked her, and she must take him, or stay on single, and risk the chance of spinsterhood. She wanted marriage. She wanted independence. And lately, when she saw a lovely baby, she had begun to want to have one of her own. Social custom, in its topsy-turveydom of sapience, tried to entice her to motherly behaviour when she was a child and could not feel maternal instinct; it offered her a doll to nurse when she needed to be nursed herself; and now that the impulse of maternity stirred naturally within her, it made the natural circumstance a thing of shame to be concealed.

Chrystal spent that week in the house. She could not ride. Chirrup, the roan pony, had long ago become too small for her; but Chirrup the Second, a roan horse, stood always in readiness at the Grange, a gift from Mrs. Yorke. Mrs. Beresford's establishment was

not large, and she did not wish to complicate it by stables and a groom ; the horse must be sold, or given back, if Chrystal did not marry Peregrine. She could not ride, for her mother refused permission without the usual escort ; neither would she walk, for fear of meeting him.

Chrystal had sent her lover a note on the afternoon of the proposal, making it as emphatic as she could :—" Peregrine, you are to stay where you are. Mrs. Yorke can come and talk it over with my mother, if she wishes ; but if you come near me in the interval, I hereby affirm that I will never marry you. Yours as you shall behave, Chrystal Beresford." So Peregrine kept away for a week, under the influence of her threat, and sent her notes daily, thrice daily, with " Don't keep me waiting, Chryssie dear !" in each. Of the love that says, " I will not take you, dear, until you love me"—of such a love as that, poor Peregrine had no power of conception. He was asking for what he coveted as a spoilt child frets for a toy withheld.

Mrs. Yorke came every day. But Chrystal would not be hurried. Peregrine Yorke was

no mate for her. "I want to choose—to choose," she reiterated to herself.

"I want to go out into the world and choose," she said, one day, to Sylvia. The sisters were alone together in the schoolroom. "I would, if I had money of my own."

"It is so delightful to be chosen," simpered Sylvia.

"Perhaps, if the right man asks one, and if he does not keep one waiting. But that does not happen often. And if I had ever wished to propose, I should never have thought of proposing to Perry."

"Choosing? Proposing? Oh, Chrystal! Women always prefer to be chosen."

Sylvia enunciated the formula as impressively as if it were a fact.

"But I am a woman, and I prefer to choose."

Then the formula was enlarged, yet narrowed, to "All nice womanly women," etc.

"I am womanly—all womanly," said Chrystal, rising and confronting her sister. "And I feel that I ought to be allowed to choose for myself."

Mrs. Yorke had been over, that morning.

"May Perry pay his visit to-morrow?"

she whispered into Chrystal's ear at parting.

The girl shook her head.

"Don't let there be very many to-morrows," said his mother, pressing the hand she held.

And Chrystal understood that, though Peregrine refrained and obeyed, he would soon become rampant, and then there would be impatience and harassment in both houses. He was already clamouring, in his letters, for a speedy marriage. He had had years to make up his mind, no one had hurried him; she might take years too, if she chose, but she would be worried by everybody concerned.

Peregrine Yorke must marry; he has estates to transmit—that she comprehended. Peregrine Yorke must marry; or he will take to fast living, and ruin his rickety constitution—that, as yet, had not occurred to her. But, in the mother's mind, the second consideration was as strongly present as the first.

"I want a lover and husband of my own choice," repeated Chrystal to herself, day by day. "I want a child of love, not a child of convenience." This she said, and thus she

felt, without quite understanding how completely true the term she had invented—child of convenience—was.

All nature was striving, that summer-time, joyously striving to fulfil and to fill full its destiny; but she—one of the highest productions of nature — was checked and prevented.

On the seventh morning, Chrystal sat alone with Mrs. Beresford in their drawing-room. It looked a charming room, each piece of furniture being small, fashionable, and appropriate, and the whole arranged with careful taste. The lady of the house, in a low restful chair, worked at embroidery; the girl, sitting back in a higher one, had composed her long limbs into a listless attitude. A homely, tranquil scene—but the crimson in Mrs. Beresford's fair cheeks had come from nervous irritation, and Chrystal was quite pale.

“Do not hurry her, do not worry her,” Mrs. Yorke had said earnestly, many times; “if we have patience, she will consent.” But discretion was not soothing to the little lady who had been discreet. Sylvia would be marrying soon and leaving her, and she

dreaded to be left alone with Chrystal. Sylvia was a nonentity, Chrystal was an entity, and the nonentity had always been the favourite; she liked Sylvia's prettiness better than Chrystal's beauty, she liked Sylvia's pettiness much better than Chrystal's originality.

"Mother, will you take me to London next season, and give me the same kind of chance that Sylvie had?"

"No," said Mrs. Beresford irritably, jerking her needle and breaking her thread, "I will not. You are behaving very badly. You are disregarding me, paining kind Mrs. Yorke, and treating a most excellent young man with contempt. I shall not reward you for that."

Silence.

"You get upon my nerves, sitting there doing nothing," complained Mrs. Beresford. "Why do you hesitate and procrastinate? Mr. Yorke will make you an unexceptionable husband——"

"If he were poor, would he?"

The satire was not answered. It had been directed at her mother, not against her comrade.

"Perry is a dear boy, and my own especial friend," said Chrystal presently. "But——"

If Peregrine had offered to buy her for a time, his offer would have been scouted as "infamous," but because he offered to buy her for life it was hailed as proper and praiseworthy. She would readily have given him part of her life, for fondness and old friendship's sake. But the whole of it!

Long silence followed. A glimmer of hope made Mrs. Beresford forbear. The room was very still; open windows let in sun and sweet scents, but no sound except a bee's hum and the distant song of a thrush. Chrystal thought and thought, and every now and then she looked at her mother tentatively. The ardour of the summer was in the girl's veins, and she wanted to know. A fatal curiosity? Nay, the curiosity was natural and right; it is caused by the stirring of life, and it tends toward the reproducing of life.

Quite a colour sprang into Chrystal's face as she crossed the room and crouched down on the carpet at Mrs. Beresford's side.

"Mother," she said, in a voice that shook, while she placed her large hands over Mrs. Beresford's little ones to stop the embroider-

ing, "there is one question that a girl can ask only of her own mother. And I ask it of you. What is the actual meaning of marriage?"

Mrs. Beresford experienced a shock of surprise. She pretended to misunderstand.

"Marriage," she began uneasily—rehearsing a formula which, like other formulas, is very often untrue—"marriage is the union of two hearts and lives——"

But Chrystal stopped her.

"I am not asking you to tell me what I know already," said the girl sternly, and disappointed; "I am asking you to tell me what I do not know. I am your daughter; we are alone here, and nobody can hear us. Oh, mother, mother dear, speak openly to me for once!" And she laid both her young arms round Mrs. Beresford's neck, and whispered her question again.

If the woman had responded, she might have saved the girl. But the inherited prejudices, the committed actions of her ancestresses hampered her, overwhelming her with embarrassment and compelling her to refuse. Centuries of past reticence were not to be repudiated by weak Mrs. Beresford. A

silence that had lasted so long could not be broken in upon by her.

"Your demand is unheard-of," she said, drawing back, all in a tingle of outraged displeasure. "Chrystal, you are an extraordinary, an unnatural girl! Sylvia never did so. It has been the object of your education to keep you ignorant throughout your maidenhood. It will be my pride to hand you both over to your husbands as innocent almost as on the days that you were born. Men like to find their wives ignorant; they expect it, and they have a right to expect it."

"Ignorant—innocent," repeated Chrystal bitterly. "The words seem to be synonymous with you!"

She sprang up, and stood fronting Mrs. Beresford, but at some distance, and she touched the table with the fingers of one hand to steady herself.

At every crisis in her life her mother had failed her. She bade her daughters pride themselves on their ignorance, and yet she had always made them ashamed of it.

The two women were silent for a space of time—one standing, one sitting. As is

generally the case in the present day, the daughter was taller and larger than the mother; and not only physically, but mentally and morally. Chrystal stood, with many thoughts and feelings hot in her brain and pulsing in her blood. Olden fashion had made of the parent an artificial person, but the girl was, above all things, natural.

"I will not be an old maid," she said to herself. "If there is no other way of finding out I will marry. I want to live my life, the life that my nature desires. I am a woman, and I claim to understand the things pertaining to my womanhood."

She looked once more at the fragile lady under whose tutelage she was, who had power over her—the power of the purse-strings.

She wanted to know and to experience: therefore she chose marriage; and maternity, which is what Mrs. Yorke had rightly called it, "the crown of our womanhood."

"Mother," she said abruptly, "do not worry yourself. I will accept Peregrine Yorke."

Mrs. Beresford had sacrificed Chrystal's need of knowledge to the supposed predi-

lections of Peregrine, and for no better reason than that women are habitually sacrificed to men. She was beginning now to despair of Chrystal, so erratic and inexplicable, who would never walk in social paths as sensibly as Sylvia walked. Upon her meditations came the abrupt "I will accept," and she felt as though Chrystal had knocked her over with one hand, and with the other picked her up and set her on a higher pedestal. She gasped, for bewilderment and joy.

"How you have relieved my mind!" she cried, embracing her. "You are doing right, dear Chrystal, at last! Now you will be happy; now you will be safe."

Three weeks later, when young Mr. Yorke stepped forward to make a speech to the Stackstead tenants and workpeople, on the day of his majority, it was a speech that his betrothed and he had composed together, and it announced his engagement to Miss Chrystal Beresford. Slender, pale, undersized he looked, speaking in a thin voice with hesitating delivery; Chrystal, beauteous and healthy, rightly proportioned and a head taller than he, stood next to

the feeble man who was to be her husband; and the family, consisting of Mrs. Yorke, Mrs. Beresford, Sylvia, and Sir Victor Tollemache, were grouped behind.

CHAPTER III.

MRS. BERESFORD felt proud of both her proposed sons-in-law. Peregrine was the richer, Sir Victor was the more presentable. Mrs. Beresford wished the two weddings to take place on the same day; but Sylvia pouted, not liking to share her glories, and Chrystal shook her head.

So Sylvia, having been engaged first, was married first, and the village of Merlemere became gay for that event, and the church of St. Dunstan had floral decorations. The bride, a finished product of our civilisation, comported herself conventionally; Chrystal was the chief bridesmaid, and as she listened to the service, she resolved more strongly than before that no such ceremonial should attend her marriage. It is correct for the bride's mother to cry, therefore Mrs. Beresford

intended to do so at the younger's wedding also ; but the tears she shed when the elder-born, now Lady Tollemache, departed with her baronet for a honeymoon on the Continent, were tears of genuine affection.

Chrystal could not be unhappy during her engagement, for she was leaving Ivy Chimneys, where her mother chid and thwarted her, to abide at Stackstead Grange, where she would be cherished. The Yorkes delighted in a nature so differing from their own ; they praised it, and were proud of it. Any other man, with Peregrine's physique, might have disgusted Chrystal, but she was accustomed to him and fond of him ; if his hands were clammy when they caressed her, she did not shrink away, but held them in her strong ones and rubbed them back to warmth. She had always been happy with Peregrine and Mrs. Yorke, and she was not unhappy with them now.

The trousseau was nearly ready, so Mrs. Beresford mentioned casually, one afternoon, that she would write the invitations next day. Thereupon Chrystal put on her hat, and walked quickly to the Grange.

"Perry is in the library, my darling," said

Mrs. Yorke, meeting her in the hall and kissing her. "How lovely you look!"

"That is for Perry to say," laughed Chrystal. "And nobody must anticipate him and impair the novelty of his compliments!"

So saying, she opened the library door and went in, and Mrs. Yorke passed on her way, up the staircase, with a happy heart.

Peregrine got up from a lounge when Chrystal entered, and hastened to her. She gave him a hearty kiss, received his caresses for a minute or two, and then, taking him by the hand, led him back to the lounge.

"Sit there," she said, "or lie there if you like; you look white, Perry."

"Never mind me," said Peregrine, for perhaps the only time in his life. He was a self-centred young man, and used to being petted by both ladies; but, just now, he could think of nobody but Chrystal.

"I have come expressly to talk about both you and me—about our wedding, Perry. It is to be at a registrar's office in London."

The young lady folded her hands in her lap, and looked calmly across at her lover.

Peregrine was in the state of mind which a

yokel gives expression to by scratching his head.

"I am afraid," he answered, "that there will be difficulties."

"Yes," said Chrystal firmly, "if you all pull against me, there *will* be difficulties. There will even be an impossibility."

"Oh, Chryssie, don't say that!"

"But if you put yourself on my side, if you and I choose to have our marriage so, who will prevent us?"

Peregrine reflected.

"Who will prevent us?" said Chrystal again, nodding at him, and smiling.

"And you would not wish it to be in your own parish church, as Sylvia's was, with our friends there, and the school-children strewing flowers before us?"

"No, I am indifferent to that. And are not you too?"

"Of course," said the young man, with a smile, "it is not the bridegroom who cares for all that flummery. I should probably be very nervous, and wish myself anywhere else. But marriages are made in heaven, and I think there should be some religious recognition of the fact."

Peregrine remembered to have heard or read somewhere that heaven was the place where marriages were made, and he always felt safe in saying something that somebody else had said before him.

Chrystal stared, for a moment.

"Do you really believe that antiquated falsehood?" she asked. "Do you not *know* differently, Perry? Marriages are made on earth, from all sorts of motives—good, intermediate, and bad. You and I are making ours. You are marrying me of your own free will, because I am young and handsome and strong, and you have taken a fancy to me——"

"Yes, I have indeed!"

"I am marrying you of my own will, because I want more independence, and also I am fond of you——"

"Dear Chryssie!"

"It is not the religious part of the ceremony that makes a valid marriage, but the legal part; and when a marriage has to be ended by divorce, the lawyers do not ask permission of the clergyman who officiated. 'Those whom God hath joined together, let no man put asunder,' said Mr. Saintsbury, the other day, and he spoke it with quite dramatic

effect. Brave words! But he has no power to enforce them. It was only part of the drama, part of the sham."

Peregrine reflected again.

"I heard the service too, the other day, and I supposed it was all right. What else did you object to? There is a certain passage, or certain passages," he said vaguely, and blushing, "which young ladies sometimes prefer to have left out. Clergymen abridge it sometimes. Mrs. Beresford could mention this to Mr. Saintsbury, and I am sure he would do anything possible to oblige. Then it would be all right, would it not, Chryssie?"

"No," said Chrystal. "The service is all wrong. It lets the man stand there free, possessing himself; but it provides somebody to give the woman away, as if she were an article of property. Do you want to receive me from Gervas, handed over to you like a bale of goods, or do you wish to receive me from myself?"

"Well, Chryssie, I am afraid I like the old way best. Are not these thoughts rather—new?"

Peregrine asked the question in a depreca-

tory tone, as if he were saying, "Is not this dress rather — shabby? Is not this bread rather — stale?" Only the complaint was reversed. Materially, he must have around him everything of the newest, thinking that the best; but intellectually, he preferred the well-worn.

"Yes, perhaps they are new. They are my own, not suggested to me from outside. And I am a new person, one of a new generation."

"But would it not be safer," ventured Peregrine, "to let older people think for us?"

Chrystal laughed merrily and long.

"Oh, Perry, you are the funniest boy! Other people could no more think for me than they could eat for me and digest for me! Thinking is a natural process, and each brain must do its own thinking, just as each stomach must do its own digesting."

Peregrine laughed also. He felt ever so much better since Chrystal had come in; she had interested him and cheered him. Of a low nervous temperament, he required continual stimulating, and it was this cheerful individuality of hers that made her a charm-

ing woman to him. Contentment and expectation crept over all his pleasurable nerves. He threw his head back on the cushion of the lounge, bending his arm underneath it and supporting it upon his hand; while he gazed fondly at her, and said, "Well, Chryssie, what next?" with something of the feeling that one has at a theatre while waiting for the curtain to rise again.

"This next," said his betrothed. "You and I are not going to tell any public falsehoods to each other. You will not declare that you endow me with all your worldly goods. Nor will I promise to obey you. I do not intend to obey you, Peregrine; I intend to obey my own sense of what is right. And, dear, it is better, much better that we should not make any extreme promises of loving each other 'as long as we both shall live.' How many couples have spoken that promise, and how many have broken it! I do not even start with loving you very much; how can I foresee whether I shall love you less or more as time goes on? And the public have nothing to do with our intimate feelings. But I know we can get on together, Perry, my boy, because we have done that for thirteen years. Mrs.

Yorke and you have never agreed with my ideas, but both of you have made me feel that I am valued here because they are not a copy of other girls'. Anything else? Yes, Perry, plenty. I will not stand up with you to be lectured publicly, with no power of replying, like two children. A lecture that holds before me the prospect of being Sarah's daughter, if I do well! Who wants to be Sarah's daughter? And how could any girl be who is not a Jewess? A lecture that tells me to reverence you—you, Perry, you! Oh, oh! A lecture with an abrupt and most ridiculous ending! The registrar will attend strictly to business; he will ask no more questions than are necessary; he will exact no promises, deliver no exordiums; and he will marry us securely, which is all that we require of him."

It was the prettiest sight, and Peregrine thought so. Chrystal's manner of speaking her long speech made it a continuous yet varying delight to him. Intent on what she was saying, she soon left her chair and moved about the room; attitude and countenance changed as her meaning was serious or merry, the words always decided but the voice

always sweet. When she said "we can get on together," she came close to him and put her hand against his cheek, and he turned his face and kissed it. Then she stood opposite to him, in her white dress, with a hat of white chiffon, her cheeks carmined, her lovely grey eyes exhilarated. When she said "Who wants to be Sarah's daughter?" she threw out one arm with a graceful gesture of defiant scorn; her "reverence you, Perry!" was spoken in a tone that made the idea as ludicrous to him as to her; and her "Oh, oh!" of laughter sounded deliciously mirth-expressive.

Peregrine's sentiment was that if Chrystal were like other girls, she would not be so interesting; there would be no such little surprises, surprises which pleased him because they were little excitements. He was not convinced by her; after all that she had said, he could have gone through the marriage-service with satisfaction; but the civil marriage would be an adventure, and as such he welcomed it. He did not agree with her, but he was enchanted with her. He ran to her with both hands outstretched, and his face glowing; their hands met, and their lips met also.

“We will have it so!” he cried. “Come, and let us get mother to make it all square with Mrs. Beresford.”

Hand in hand, they danced laughingly down the long polished floor—the impulse and impetus Chrystal’s—and out through the open doorway, into the hall beyond, and vanished.

CHAPTER IV.

MRS. BERESFORD was intensely angered when Mrs. Yorke explained the arrangement to her. There was no formula for that occurrence, therefore she used her own words.

“This is Chrystal’s doing,” she said resentfully.

“Chryssie all over!” agreed Gervas, who was reading in the window-seat.

“Yes,” said Mrs. Yorke. “The plan is Chrystal’s wish, but Peregrine is greatly taken with it; he enjoys what he calls ‘the fun of the thing.’ And I am glad of their decision also; it will spare my son’s strength. The heat and the excitement are trying him already. Chryssie can be married in a travelling-dress, and they can start fresh from the office on their trip into Kent.”

"I shall be absent," said Mrs. Beresford, in a flutter of helpless offence. "I am not required at such a performance as that. I shall send her up to town under your charge."

"No, do not do so," said Mrs. Yorke, putting a remonstrating hand on the little lady's arm, "or Merlemere gossips will spread a report that you dislike the match."

"True, true; yes, I must countenance it. But what a disgraceful affair! No invitations, no function, no bridal veil, no cake!"

"There can be no wedding, but there can be a marriage; and that is the principal thing. As for the cake," smiled Mrs. Yorke, "I will have one ready for the young couple's return. André, our new French cook, is an accomplished confectioner, and will be proud to do his best. There shall be festivities enough at the Grange when the young people come home."

"Well," sighed Mrs. Beresford, with a slight rapid gesture of washing the hands, "you have always spoilt her as a Beresford, and you will spoil her completely as a Yorke."

"I cannot be grateful enough to her,"

replied Mrs. Yorke, very gravely. "What would become of my boy without her?"

Mrs. Beresford coloured. She did not like Chrystal's marriage to be spoken of as a sacrifice, for that sounded a reflection on herself—Chrystal's natural guardian. She answered weariedly.

"I doubt whether Chrystal cares much for me and Sylvia; but she loves you, and she loves Peregrine. She has always been happier with you two than with us."

"She is our treasure," said Mrs. Yorke, smiling brightly, and clasping Mrs. Beresford's limp hand.

And, with that, she went home.

"Then, I shall not be required to give the bride away," observed Gervas, from his window-seat.

"Give her away?" echoed Mrs. Beresford sarcastically. "Your sister Chrystal gives herself away! She needs no bride's veil to hide her blushes; she does not intend to blush! Everything is to be reversed when she marries, all the old honoured customs are to be shuffled aside, and new ones introduced instead!" She ended with a shrill, contemptuous little laugh.

Honoured those old customs are. But are they honourable ?

“Evidently,” said the young man, “my sister Chrystal is a thought too modern for Ivy Chimneys. Let us hope that she will flourish more congenially at Stackstead Grange.”

Mrs. Beresford sulked during the following days, and Chrystal spent nearly all her time at the other house. There was no unpleasantness, from first to last, in her engagement: the hours passed without any effort; Peregrine could play and Chrystal could sing, and she might often be seen with her arm round his neck in comradeship.

Chrystal's future life came so near that it was already mingling with the present; her clothes, marked with new initials, were packed into trunks that had her new surname painted on the top in white letters. One afternoon, the party started for London; and the next morning, Mr. and Mrs. Yorke drove from the registrar's office to the railway-station, on their way to St. Margaret's-at-Cliffe, near Dover. Thence, after a brief honeymoon, they proceeded to the Pyrenees,

and reappeared in Eastshire at the end of September.

Stackstead Grange had not been refurnished, as Peregrine promised in his incoherent proposal, for Mrs. Yorke had suggested that Yorke Hall should be refurnished instead, as soon as the first baby was born, and he and his wife had agreed with pleasure.

Life at the Grange did not appear greatly altered by the marriage. Chrystal was rather colder, more reserved with Mrs. Yorke, but tender and patient with Peregrine. His ill-health had a dulling effect upon him, but he seemed content. The house soon filled with visitors, Sir Victor and Lady Tolle-mache among the number.

On the evening of their arrival, Sylvia was asked to sing.

The song that she sang was French. It is an exquisite sigh.

“Plaisir d’amour
Dure un moment ;
Chagrin d’amour
Dure toute la vie.”

Sylvia sang this most pathetically. Her conduct was not very complimentary to her

husband, but he did not mind ; conventional actions and utterances are, as Mrs. Beresford had said on one occasion, quite meaningless. Lady Tollemache's plaint was heard with great satisfaction by the company because she sang it ; if she had spoken it, they would have professed themselves shocked. But Chrystal could not have sung regretfully, despairingly, when she was happy. Under Sylvia's conditions, she would have chosen an arch love-song. Music was to her the expression of her emotions, and the music that she played and sang, that autumn and winter, was stately, self-contained, yet music that had hope in it.

Chrystal Yorke was looking forward to her confinement. She could not decide whether she wanted most a son or a daughter. "Boy-baby, girl-baby," she said often to herself, to try which sounded the sweeter.

Mrs. Yorke was devoted to her.

"It used to be always, 'We must take care of Perry between us,'" half-laughed, half-grumbled Peregrine, one day, to his mother ; "and now it is always, 'Take care of her, Perry, take care of her.'"

"Never mind," said his wife ; "after the

spring, in the early summer, you shall go back to your position of chief invalid. But you will never be chief pet again," she added jestingly. "Our baby will be that."

One wintry afternoon, two gentlemen's cards were brought to Chrystal, and she read the names, "Lord Hautayne" and "Captain Dampier." She ordered the callers to be shown in, and sent the cards upstairs to her mother-in-law. But instead of Mrs. Yorke, a message came down that the lady had a headache and must excuse herself. Chrystal and her husband entertained the visitors.

As Peregrine passed his mother's door, a little later, she opened it and beckoned him in.

"Oblige me, Perry, by not having a dinner-party while Captain Dampier is at the Castle. He is only to be there three days. Ditmas told me, this morning."

Ditmas was the elder Mrs. Yorke's confidential attendant, who had accompanied her into Eastshire from Northumberland. She was a trustworthy woman.

"Does Ditmas know anything about him?" asked Peregrine, wondering. "Do you know him, mother?"

"No, but he is connected with the Prendergasts, whose estate runs next to yours. Did Captain Dampier say anything about Blackwater?"

"He asked me if I liked the Grange better than Yorke Hall, and I said that I had never seen Yorke Hall."

"And then?"

"And then—nothing. By-the-bye, mother," said Peregrine, taking sudden offence, "*why* have I never seen it?"

"You were a delicate boy, my dear, and the northern cold was too strong for you. Then the place was let. Then we made acquaintance with Chrystal, and you never cared to leave her."

"She might have gone there with us."

"Yorke Hall was let," repeated Mrs. Yorke, with a certain monotony in her voice.

"But it will be vacated next summer, and I shall take Chrystal there," said Peregrine.

"Yes, yes, I hope so. I hope so. And the baby. Your baby and hers, Perry. We shall be proud to show the bonny son and heir."

"Chryssie is talking of asking Captain Dampier to dine to-morrow, and inviting her mother and Mr. Saintsbury to meet him and the Hautaynes."

"Stop it. Stop it," said Mrs. Yorke. "We do not want Captain Dampier in this house."

"Is there any scandal against him? Is he not a person for Chryssie to know?"

"Hush, silly boy!" said Peregrine's mother, stroking back a lock of his hair. "No, nothing of that kind. But do as I tell you, Perry. Have I ever considered anything, these twenty-one years, except your well-being and happiness, and hers as necessary to yours?"

Winter went by. Spring began. And the crown of Chrystal's womanhood was approaching.

But what if the child should take after its father?

That thought came too late. And she tried—and tried—not to think it.

CHAPTER V.

"Is she all right?" asked the young mother.

"She is fairly strong," said the doctor evasively.

But Chrystal looked in wonder at a miserable little face, and her baby's wailing sounded woeful to her.

Day after day, she wondered and questioned. Day after day, "She is fairly strong," said the doctor cheerfully—"Babies always cry," said Mrs. Yorke reassuringly.

But, one morning, she overheard them whispering together. Raising herself on her elbow, she listened, and caught words spoken by her mother-in-law—the words, "tell her."

"What are you two whispering about?" came feverishly from the bed. "Tell me at once, tell me at once! What is there to tell?"

The doctor advanced.

"Your baby is fairly strong," he began, as usual. "But—she has—a slight—curvature—of the spine."

Chrystal sank back, and her face became rigid. They tended her well, though Mrs. Yorke's hands were deathly cold as she succoured the suffering young woman.

It was evident that the child was going to live. There was no need to baptise it in haste, lest it should die before it had got a ticket for heaven. It had enough of its father to make it suffer, and enough of its mother to make it able to endure. Peregrine came seldom into the sick-room ; he needed attendance himself, and he thought that Chryssie's anxiety should have been for him instead of for a puling girl-infant.

On the day before the christening, he said to his wife :

"You wish baby to be called Chrystal?"

"No," she answered, with tears in her eyes. "I did wish it, but not now. She is not my child, she is yours."

"I shall call her Henrietta, after my mother."

"Call her what you please," said Chrystal,

with utter languor. "She is a Yorke." And she remained sitting back on the sofa, staring at nothing.

But slowly, surely, health came back into her frame, and she was convalescent. A young woman of twenty-one, with a failing husband and a deformed child! What had she done? What compact had she made? Was it the crown of her womanhood to bear sickly children to a sickly man?

"Chryssie is quite changed," complained Peregrine. "She never says 'Perry, dear boy,' now. She has left off talking and laughing. She is not the same Chryssie at all."

"Oh, Perry dear," pleaded his mother, "have patience with poor Chrystal. My dear, my dear, my heart is breaking; I must go away, and perhaps you and she will draw nearer together when I am gone."

So Mrs. Yorke made arrangements for wintering abroad, and left the Grange, accompanied by Ditmas.

She said good-bye to Chrystal in the latter's boudoir, where she sat with the cradle beside her.

"Better luck next time," Mrs. Yorke ven-

tured to whisper, while the smile that she tried to summon flickered over her face.

But Chrystal drew back coldly.

"There must never be another," she said.

Peregrine soon became restless: his mother was gone, his wife was changed, and "that ugly infant" was continually crying.

Chrystal spent hours in pacing the Grange nursery, with her light burden in her strong arms, trying to still its moans against her loving breast. The baby had a fair share of strength, but the strength she had given her was a misfortune instead of a benefit. Chrystal would rather she had died.

"Oh, baby, I am ashamed, ashamed!" she said often. And, to herself, the murmur went on perpetually: "I have sinned once. Shall I sin again? Shall I go on sinning through the best years of my life?"

Therefore she was cold to her husband.

"Is there anything you would like me to give you?" asked Peregrine, bending over her one day. "Any jewellery?"

"Nothing."

"Would you care to go to Yorke Hall?"

"No. What should I go there for? Would my child grow straight there?"

"Is there anything in the wide world that would make you what you used to be?"

"There is one thing I should like," said poor Chrystal. "To be left alone. Go and join your mother in Venice, Peregrine, and leave me with baby."

Peregrine called it a capital idea, and departed immediately.

Chrystal did not want for sympathy and advice:—

"It is very sad," said Lady Hautayne. "But you are young, you will have others."

"If you cannot enjoy the pleasures of wifhood, you can at least perform its duties," said Mrs. Beresford. "Do this bravely, Chrystal, and then your reward will be an easy conscience, and perhaps a healthier baby next time."

Sylvia possessed a beautiful boy. She had also become pious and High Church, and this was how she wrote: "Take up your cross, dear, and bear it. Our heavenly Father knows what is best for each of us. There must be some wise intention in this affliction of yours; if you accept it with a good grace, your next child may be different."

They all spoke of "the next." But Chrystal was horrified.

Not one of them could have felt a shred of compassion for the helpless young ones whom they were inciting her to bear.

"The crime of bringing diseased children into the world—that is the crime I am invited to commit, that law and the Christian religion require me to commit. And the civilised world is replenished mostly by children of convenience."

Thus communed Chrystal. All her moral consciousness rose in revolt against this teaching: all her physical being craved for that crown of her womanhood—a healthy, happy child; the longing fastened upon her, and did not leave her.

There was a path through the Stackstead Grange grounds, which made a short-cut between the Castle and the village; and Lord and Lady Hautayne had a general permission for themselves, and their visitors, to use it. Therefore Chrystal was not surprised, one winter day, to hear steps and voices coming near as she sat in a corner of a rustic bench, on a high bank above the frosty gravel path. Looking round some rhododendron bushes,

she saw Captain Dampier, with another gentleman, and Willy Hautayne, a boy of eleven.

“It is a pity the heiress is deformed,” said the stranger’s voice.

Captain Dampier’s answer was spoken just as they came underneath her; she recognised his voice and his habit of clipping his sentences.

“Comes of a rotten stock. Father was a hunchback. Two others died—fortunately. Peregrine was the best of the lot. That poor lady has gone through something in her lifetime. Know all about them through the Prendergasts. And that glorious young woman—what a deadly shame!”

They passed on, Willy Hautayne running in front of them. And Chrystal sat still for a long time.

Her case had been summed up by Captain Dampier in few words:—

“And that glorious young woman. What a deadly shame!”

CHAPTER VI.

WHEN Chrystal Yorke moved, her first action was to seek her mother. She came in upon Mrs. Beresford, unannounced, in her drawing-room at Ivy Chimneys.

“Mother,” she said, without any preamble, “did you know that my husband’s father was a humpbacked man?”

“No, I did not know it,” protested Mrs. Beresford, shrinking—the girl’s face looked so grave and terrible. “Before God, I never knew it!”

“Ah!” said Chrystal, drawing a deep breath. “I am glad you were not as guilty as I thought.” And she turned away, and went home.

But there was still enough reproach in her words to make Mrs. Beresford feel some contrition.

"Good morning, Mrs. Yorke," called out Mr. Antrobus, behind her; but Chrystal could not listen with patience to the old reminder, and she walked swiftly on.

Hesketh, the butler, met her on her entrance, and handed her a black-edged envelope. The post-mark was Venice. It contained a letter from Peregrine, saying that his mother had died after a few days' illness. The letter was full of details: Mrs. Yorke was buried, and the English visitors had sent quantities of flowers; Ditmas had returned to Northumberland to settle there with her kindred; her mistress had left her a pension, and Peregrine had given her the contents of the wardrobe to sell; his valet was busy packing Mrs. Yorke's valuables, to send back to Merlemere. The postscript consisted of one sentence: "I am tired of all the dismals, and I am going to Paris to enjoy myself."

Before she died, Mrs. Yorke had told him the story of his family.

The second enclosure was from Mrs. Yorke herself. Chrystal held in her hand the woman's confession.

"Oh, Chryssie, forgive me! I loved you, but I sacrificed you. You will call it a plot,

and so it was; you will think I ought to have relented to you all those years, and so I ought. But it was for my only son's sake. Will you not do the same for your son in your turn? I will tell you all my history. I was a daughter of the clergyman of the village — Blackwater, in Northumberland; there were so many of us that our parents had difficulty in feeding and clothing and educating us properly, and they had a great deal of charity from the Hall. The Yorkes were a diseased family, and I was married young to the humpbacked heir in the hope of saving the family. My two eldest babies died, and I—their mother—was glad of it. Oh, Chryssie, I have had troubles! When Mr. Yorke died, he left me sole trustee and guardian of the child that was coming. Then I bought Stackstead Grange, and came to remote Merlemere, where the Yorkes were not known, having something to conceal for Perry's sake. And to conceal from Perry also. He was very ill as a baby, but I nursed him back to life; he was my only one, and I could not let him go. Chryssie, I *made* him live — perhaps I had better have let him die. Then you came, a

child of seven years old, and you were everything to him that I could not be. You always did your part, dear. Together we envired the boy with care and cheer. Chryssie, oh Chryssie, do not separate from Peregrine! Dying, I leave him to you. And, Chryssie dear, it is your duty now; do that duty, and trust to God.

Your broken-hearted friend,

HENRIETTA YORKE."

"She sacrificed me, but she loved me," sobbed Chrystal, and kissed the letter and put it in her bosom.

Chrystal knew now exactly how far she had been sinned against by Mrs. Yorke, by Mrs. Beresford, and by Peregrine. Her friend, who should have saved her, was treacherous to her; her mother, who should have made inquiries, and dissuaded her, pushed her on; Peregrine's sin was the least. He did not know the health-history of his family. Mrs. Yorke had not let him be pointed at as "the son of a humpback;" she had kept him at a distance from Blackwater; but she had always meant him to go there, some day, with a beautiful wife and a vigorous

heir, and then, she hoped, the past would be forgotten.

The death of her mother-in-law made only the difference of crape in Chrystal Yorke's attire. She had dressed in black since Etta was born.

Mrs. Yorke's letter kept her company for many days, and she read it over and over.

"Will you not do the same in your turn?"—

"No! No!" said Chrystal sternly, taking her child in her arms. "Morality forbid that I should sacrifice a fresh young life to any poor weakling of mine! But how could I, to this one? Women are sacrificed to men, not men to women. If any man wished to marry Etta, he could make inquiry, and would do it knowing what he did. I shall teach her that she ought to refuse."

"Chryssie, dear, it is your duty now."—

That was what her relatives and friends had said. "Resume the duties of a wife," had been their chorus; by which was meant, "Produce more Yorkes." But no; but no, her mind replied; it could not be her duty to help her husband to do wrong. The sin of procreation by an unfit man—could

there be a greater sin when done knowingly?

"Do that duty, and trust to God."

"I will not trust to God," answered Chrystal solemnly. "If Peregrine and his father and his child are God's handiwork, why should I trust God again? He has lost any claim to be trusted. If all that has happened is God's will—oh, what a wicked will! Sylvia thinks it 'best' for Etta to suffer; no other innocent shall suffer for my doings! With the cry of my child in my ears, could I harden my heart to please religion and society?"

The act of marriage was at an end for her. But she was mature; and she was sore-hearted. Motherhood was what she wanted—successful motherhood.

"I must call on Mrs. Yorke," said Captain Dampier, as he sat breakfasting with the party at Hautayne Castle.

The earl looked down on his plate and grinned. The countess hesitated.

"Let me advise you only to leave a card, Captain Dampier. Mr. Yorke has been absent from the Grange since September, and young Mrs. Yorke has just heard of the death of his mother. It would be more

seemly, under these circumstances, not to go in."

But Captain Dampier did go in, and enjoyed half an hour's talk with Chrystal, for she had no regard for etiquette, and his pronounced regard for it was theoretical.

The next event was that Mrs. Beresford died suddenly ; and, she having lately become richer by legacies, the portion that she left her younger daughter amounted to £500 a year. Chrystal, therefore, had an income of her own—which nobody could take away—and she was independent.

One day, in January, Lady Hautayne called at Stackstead Grange. Mrs. Yorke came into the room, so crape-clad, and looking so dignified, that the countess had some difficulty in beginning.

"My dear Chrystal, you will excuse my interference, I hope, but I have known you since you were a child, and Captain Dampier is staying in my house, therefore I feel almost as if I were responsible. I am told that you receive him every day, or nearly every day?"

"I receive him whenever he comes," said Chrystal quietly. "What wrong has he ever

done me that I should turn him away from my doors?"

"But surely you know that society does not permit a young, handsome, married woman to encourage visits from gentlemen during the absence of her husband? I mean during his prolonged absence."

"I am tired of the conventions of society, and indifferent to them."

"But you are in double mourning, Chrystal—for your mother and your mother-in-law."

"I am in mourning for my deformed daughter," said Chrystal simply.

Her dress was crape-covered for Mrs. Yorke and Mrs. Beresford, but her heart was mourning for Etta.

Lady Hautayne thought that her mind must be getting deranged.

"Where is Mr. Yorke now? You hear from him pretty often, I suppose?"

"Yes. From him or his valet. He is enjoying himself in Paris."

Chrystal quoted Peregrine's own words.

"Send for your husband home again, my dear; or go to him. You will not be safe until you do."

Safe! Safe with Peregrine Yorke!

Chrystal shook her head.

Finding that she could not prevail, Lady Hautayne returned to the Castle, and intimated politely to Captain Dampier that his visit must be terminated. The Hautaynes made a quarrel of everything; so Lord Hautayne took his friend's part, and swore at his wife privately for being so "confoundedly particular." But Captain Dampier only laughed; he hired a cottage in Merlemere, and the gentlemen were together as before. Lord Hautayne had taken a great fancy to him.

Also Captain Dampier's visits to Stackstead Grange went on daily as before.

Physically, he was a splendid animal; morally, he was conservative; intellectually, he was nothing. There are so many Captain Dampiers in the world! A passion of desire possessed Chrystal—not for the man, but for the child that he could give her; it was the impulse of maternity that impelled her towards him. Captain Dampier could not know this: he was not a psychological student but a military man, and he held the Conservative's opinion that women were all alike. He supposed it was a conquest,

though it did not feel quite like one. She never said a word of love; she sat back while he leaned forward; yet she regarded him intently with a curious kind of reflecting admiration, and occasionally let fall such a phrase as "How strong you are!" and once she touched his head with the tips of her fingers, and remarked, "Your hair is very thick."

One evening, in March, came the inevitable question :

"When is it to be?" whispered agitatedly by Captain Dampier.

"I must go to Paris to see Mr. Yorke," answered Chrystal, and she did not whisper; "he has sent for me. Afterwards I will go into Switzerland. And then I will write for you."

"And I shall come," said Captain Dampier, holding her in a strong embrace.

It never entered into this conservative man's head that she was going to tell her husband.

CHAPTER VII.

CHRYSTAL YORKE left Merlemere for Paris, accompanied by her child and its nurse.

She breakfasted in the coffee-room of the hotel, and was then shown into a private salon upstairs.

“So you have brought that fretting brat?” was Peregrine’s welcome to her.

“Yes, but she will not annoy you; I have sent her into her own room with nurse. You are looking ill, Peregrine.”

“I have been living fast in Paris.”

“Yes, I know it; I see it,” answered his wife.

She stood, leisurely taking off her wraps; while he remained, a shrunken form, cowering among shawls in his armchair. She had just arrived from a journey, but it was he who looked exhausted.

"Mother always knew I should," whimpered Peregrine. "That was why she wanted me to marry early. But we will go to the Riviera, and I shall recover there; you are my wife, Chryssie, and you must cherish me and be a wife to me."

"Dying, I leave him to you," had been Mrs. Yorke's charge, and Chrystal had kept it in her mind ever since. She drew a long breath before answering.

"I will go with you, Peregrine," she said then, steadily. "Not because I am your wife, for that I ought never to have been; nor because I have borne you a child, for that I ought never to have done; but for the sake of your dear dead mother. I will give you my care and companionship, but not my person——"

"Oh, as for that," interrupted Peregrine coolly, "we must take things as they come. The sins of the fathers, you know, are always visited on the children."

This sounded so religious and right to him.

"The sins of the fathers shall not be visited on the children with my connivance," said Chrystal fiercely. "That is a crime I

have committed once, and will never commit again."

"Why, Chryssie!" exclaimed Peregrine, astonished and apprehensive. "If you live with your husband, and give him an heir, who could possibly blame you?"

"The heir himself would have a right to blame me. I am responsible to each child I bear for a healthy constitution, for a sound mind, and for a fair chance of happiness."

This was a new doctrine to Peregrine.

"We are told," he corrected her reprovingly, "that children are sent by the Lord."

"We are told a great many foolish things, but we are not obliged to believe them. Do not repeat to me that old falsehood, which every grown person knows to be false. Children are brought by the parents. If I bring you a second child into the world, Peregrine, I do it as a consequence of my own act; and I choose *not* to do it."

She was a year younger than he, but how many years better, wiser, worthier!

Then she told him her plan, and made him her offer. She would return here from Switzerland, would take him to the Riviera, or home to Merlemere if he preferred, would

devote her strength to his weakness, her good spirits to his depression, and be to him the Chryssie that she was before their disastrous marriage ; she would cleave to him, in that way, all his life, for the sake of Mrs. Yorke and of their many associations. But—she intended to be the mother of a healthful child.

“ Good God ! ” ejaculated Peregrine, after a pause of bewilderment. “ Is this the New Woman ? ” And he looked at her as if she were an unclean thing.

It was Chrystal’s first acquaintance with the *fin-de-siècle* expression. Colour rose up in her face with pleasure.

“ I hope so ! ” she answered him. “ Our world is an old world, and in need of much renewing. If I am too new for you, you can divorce me and get another wife. The Olden Women are still in the majority ; there is many and many a one,” said Chrystal, with bitter sadness, “ who will fill her nursery with fretful sufferers—children of convenience—in order to perpetuate a surname. You have my offer now. Shall I go with you or not ? ”

The young man was in a condition of anger and amaze.

"How dare you ask me," he said, bending forward and staring at her, "to consent to my own dishonour? How dare you ask me to bring up another man's child as my own?"

"Dishonour, Peregrine?" she replied, pathos in her rich voice. "When you proposed to marry me, you consented to your own dishonour. *That* was your dishonour—to take advantage of a girl's ignorance. Another man's child—true; but your wife's child, Peregrine, the child of the wife whom you have injured. That would be reparation."

"Injured you? I? I offered honourable marriage; I gave you handsome pin-money, and made you mistress of the Grange and of Yorke Hall. What does a man always do when he falls in love and has enough to marry on? What—in your opinion—ought I to have done?"

"You should have questioned your mother; you should have consulted a doctor; and having learnt the truth from both of them, you should have loved me too well, Perry, to sacrifice me. You could have gone away."

"And left the Grange to take care of itself? Ousted from both my properties!" cried Peregrine.

The property! The property!

"You could have lived at Yorke Hall."

"Son of a hunchback!" he snarled.

"Yes," said Chrystal gently. "The son of a humpbacked man. Inferior bodily, but morally great. But I am not blaming you, Perry, poor boy"—She went near, and took his thin chilled hand—"I am only telling you it was the right thing to do. I am not blaming you, dear, for not doing it. The fault is your parents' for bringing you into the world without any possibility of your consent being asked. And, again, the fault is their parents', who should have taught them better. And back and back we might go, trying to fix the blame. That is not necessary. It is enough that I abstain from blaming you; it is enough that, having done wrong once, in ignorance, I will not do it again. The relationship I offer you is not a very strange one: that husband and wife should live as friends, under one roof, is nothing new; it is a common incident in novels, and not very uncommon in real life."

"Then, stay with me, and let that man Dampier go and hang himself!"

"I claim my woman's right to bear one happy child."

"Why not a dozen?" sneered Peregrine. "How could I be sure of you?"

"You can be surer of me," said his wife, keeping her temper, but stepping back, "than many men are of their wives, for their wives deceive them. Is it the most shocking part of this case that I have not deceived you?"

"But how do I know that you will not come to me again and again with this preposterous demand?"

"Because I must have no more than I can do my duty by. A great deal of my time will be given up to you. I will content myself with one. And I do not think I am a person to fall in love easily; I have never done so yet."

"You love this man—Dampier—I suppose?"

"No, I do not love him. I am fonder of you than of him. Nor does he love me, although he calls and thinks it love. Peregrine, decide."

"Decide!" mocked Peregrine, in a ridiculous voice, and stirring in his chair. Then he said slowly and emphatically, pointing his finger at her: "If I bring up your bastard—your bastard—do you hear me, woman?"

"I am altogether indifferent to the law. I care for realities, not formalities."

"If I bring up your bastard as a Yorke, I cheat my next heir—Colonel Yorke, of the Guards. Is that what you are contemplating?"

"No, no."

"If I bring it up as a Dampier, how could we face the shame?"

"I intend to face the shame, in any case," said Chrystal. "Be brave, Peregrine; feel shame only when there is something to be ashamed of."

"Go to," said Peregrine, lapsing into a Biblical phrase. "You have led a retired life, and you do not know the world. I tell you it is impossible."

Chrystal drew a deep breath of relief.

"Then, I will say good-bye."

She held out her hand. He shook his shoulders, refusing it.

"And I shall be left alone, and I shall go to the bad. Mother said she was afraid I should. And it will be all your fault!"

"Nay," said Chrystal, "it will be the fault of your father and mother, who foisted you into the world, poor boy, without the stamina to resist vice. But say the word, Perry, and I will return to you."

"It is impossible. It will be your fault," whined Peregrine again. "Ring the bell for Pierpoint."

"Do you allow me to take Etta? The law gives her to you."

"What should I do with an infant deformity? Keep her yourself. She is a girl; she cannot inherit the Yorke estate; and I shall sell Stackstead Grange."

The property—always the property!

"Good-bye, Peregrine."

"Good-bye. Ring the bell for Pierpoint; I want a glass of wine, and to-day's *Figaro*."

Chrystal rang the bell, and left him.

It had been a strange colloquy between husband and wife. She had stood, strong, self-reliant, firm of purpose, resolute to do right; while he had sat, infirm throughout, clinging to past ideas and phraseology, beat-

ing his hands ineffectually against the grand advancing thought of the present.

Peregrine Yorke did not apply for a divorce and marry again. It was not the wickedness of the latter action that deterred him ; but he was weakly, timid, averse from publicity and from the trouble of any occupation. He went to Monte Carlo, attended by his valet Pierpoint. He lingered on the Continent for a few years, and then died. Yorke Hall passed to a distant and a strong branch of the Yorke family. It was best so. A worn-out stock ought not to be perpetuated. Worn-out families ought to die out.

CHAPTER VIII.

CHRYSTAL'S arrangements were easily made. She had taken the precaution of bringing trunks without a name on them, but with written labels tied to the handles; she discharged the nurse, giving her a month's wages, and paying her journey back to Eastshire; she took the labels off the boxes, and removed to another hotel, where she registered under the name of Mrs. Dampier; she engaged a French nurse, wrote new labels for the luggage, and took the train for Dijon; thence she wrote to Captain Dampier, and there she awaited his arrival. The party went together into Switzerland, to Champéry, in the canton Valais, and lived in a furnished wooden chalet until the end of Captain Dampier's

leave. He was going to India, to rejoin his battery.

Stackstead Grange and Ivy Chimneys were both empty now; the Grange was shut up, and for sale. Mrs. Yorke and Mrs. Beresford were dead, Peregrine and Chrystal were abroad, Sylvia was with her husband, and Gervas at Aldershot with his regiment. None of them ever saw Merlemere again.

Captain Dampier was a "law and order" man in theory, but this was not the first of his illegal honeymoons. He supposed this excursion to be as much according to rule as his former one had been: he supposed that it was partially a secret from the husband, that Mr. Yorke imagined Chrystal alone with the child and nurse, and that she would continue to reside at Merlemere as before. He was one of those men who think they know everything without asking any questions, and he treated his suppositions as facts. No doubt she was deceiving her husband — did not women always deceive their husbands in such cases? no doubt Yorke thought she was in Switzerland for her

child's health only; no doubt she would complete the treachery by fathering the new baby upon him: that was the established mode of conducting these little affairs.

Even when Dampier did ask a question, he had a habit of answering it himself. This was his style of enquiry:—

“Heard from Yorke to-day? No. Not much of a correspondent. Lazy fellow. Shall want a big lunch put up to take on the tramp to-day; can't speak French; you see to it for me, dear?”

His lusty frame required and enjoyed strong exercise, and he spent many hours in tramping over the mountains. Sensible of her not to offer to go with him—might have been a drag on him—stayed with Etta—it was a woman's place to stay with her child.

Captain Dampier and Chrystal had not much to say to each other. She interpreted his reserve as intimating that he did not wish to be informed; and partly she was correct; for if Dampier had suspected any departure from the usual routine, he would certainly not have chosen to know it. He was not the man

to alter his career for an illegal love : this intrigue must not be allowed to embarrass his arrangements in the future ; he might marry ; therefore he did not ask her to correspond with him. They were rather silent when together—he taking everything for granted, and she being preoccupied. It scarcely seemed worth while to her to controvert his old-worn opinions on all subjects ; and if she did say any unaccustomed thing, he concluded she was joking. Thus Captain Dampier lived with Chrystal for two months, and never knew what kind of woman she was. That is the Conservative's way.

While Dampier roamed the mountains, he had no doubt that she was thinking of him all the time ; was not that what women always did in the short absences of their lovers ? As the honeymoon drew to its end, he felt much obliged to her for not bothering him with any regrets ; that had not been his experience with his other temporary bride. He thought she behaved very pluckily at the parting.

He held her in his arms to say good-bye, and remarked :

"Pay you a visit at the Grange directly I land from India. Not more than a year, at most."

"I am not going to live at the Grange again," said Chrystal.

"Oh, nonsense," smiled Dampier, taking this as a compliment to himself. "Sensible girl. Go back to your husband. But don't forget me." He kissed her again. "Not a minute to lose! Must run for it! Good-bye, darling!"

Catching up his rug and sticks, he ran to the diligence, and was soon driving out of Champéry. He settled himself in a corner to think of her. It had been an entirely pleasant affair; he would like to repeat it some day, if that could be managed; she had been a trifle silent, a trifle "heavy on hand" sometimes, but otherwise perfect. He hoped she was not crying her eyes out for him. He would be sure to go and see her, first thing, when he got back to England. Then she would send for the children into the drawing-room; and one of them—the infant—would have his eyes! He trusted she had enough tact to choose a time when Yorke was out of the room, for he might

wish to show some sentiment on such an occasion. A whisper and a kiss would be appropriate!

So cogitated Captain Dampier, until a fellow-passenger entered into talk with him; and afterwards, he let "the little affair" drop almost out of his mind.

Chrystal could have loved the man, if he had been different. But he was not her mate.

She put on her hat, and climbed up a mountain-path, to her favourite sitting-spot. It was lovely spring-time, and she sat there, seeing the landscape, enjoying it very intensely, but with her thoughts at large. This was the moment for which she had been hoping and waiting since the inheritance from Mrs. Beresford set her economically free. She had offered to forego it for Peregrine, but her offer had been rejected, and she was glad — glad. It was a unique moment for her. She was a free woman. She had the economic independence which is the crux of the whole situation; she had the intention, and the ability—financial and also mental ability—to order her own life. At the age of twenty-two, hindered by no

prejudices, accountable to no person but herself, she saw her future before her to do what she would with it. The moment was unique and happy.

Sylvia and Chrystal had been taught to look down in humility and to look up in prayer, but it had always been Chrystal's nature to look straight forward and press onward.

The Olden Woman strays sometimes when sexually tempted ; but she goes back to her husband, and says nothing about it. That was not Chrystal's way. The Olden Woman would have submitted to her position—wife of Peregrine Yorke, mother of Peregrine Yorke's children ; the New Woman does not accept a wrong done to her ; she frees herself from it. "You cannot grasp at happiness, dear," Sylvia had written, in one of her elder-sisterly letters ; "we must all receive it or do without it, just as the Lord may be pleased to give or to withhold." But Chrystal had seen that the only method of attaining happiness was to undertake the management of the matter.

Captain Dampier paid for himself and Mrs. Dampier up to the date of his departure,

while she paid for Etta and Etta's nurse. She preferred to bear her own expenses also, but he told her he would be offended if she did, and that he liked to do things "in proper order." "According to precedent," was what he really meant, for the conservative idea of propriety and order does not include irregular honeymoons. But he followed the conservative practice in saying one thing while meaning another.

Chrystal did not make a change immediately. She had to take care of her health. So she stayed on in the chalet through that summer. This period was the hush of her life, and bright with wonderful expectation, for the maternal passion—in a womanly nature—is as strong at times as the sexual. Only the pale peaky face of her Etta reminded her that she had done wrong once, inadvertently. "My Crime, my poor little Crime," was one of the mother's regretful epithets for her. "But I am making all the reparation that is possible; if I have brought disease and pain into the world, I will bring health and joy into it also."

She had had a child of convenience. She was now to have a child of maternity.

When autumn came, Chrystal conveyed herself and Etta back to England ; there was much to be done before they could be settled in for the winter.

CHAPTER IX.

CLYST was a small country-town, situated in one of the Midland counties of England. And it was here that Chrystal Dampier elected to dwell. On the outskirts of the town stood a little house, which, having been unoccupied for a considerable time, was known as "the empty house in the Upclevé Road"—afterwards shortened into "the empty house," as if it were the only domicile to let in Clyst. One day, early in the October of that year, workmen were observed going in and out, and it soon became known that the house had been taken by a Mrs. Dampier, who was putting up at the Crown Hotel.

"Dampier—Dampier," might be heard pronounced at the afternoon tea-tables in Clyst. "Do you know that name?"

No, nobody did.

"But she must have brought introductions."

"Oh, of course."

"Well, when the house is ready, and she has appeared once at church, we shall see what to do."

Chrystal was delighted with the new house being prepared for her, and the more so because it required a complete doing-up, and could therefore be arranged in exact accordance with her taste. Her days were so busy, so interested!

"I have seen the lady of the empty house," said Miss Orme—Clyst's chief gossip—coming in upon her friend, Mrs. Kniveton, one morning. "I saw her standing in the garden, directing the gardener, as I went by. She is such a beauty, so it is lucky for the young ladies of our town that she is married! I wonder where her husband is."

"A widow perhaps?" said Mrs. Kniveton.

"Oh dear, no. She is quite young; and she is not wearing weeds; and she is——"

Here there were mysterious nods and winks, because there happened to be a girl of seventeen in the room, who understood their signification as well as did the ladies who were nodding and winking.

"The painting and papering are done, I could see that through the window-panes; and a man had just finished painting the name on the gate-posts. Guess what it is. The Nutshell!"

"Capital! A very pretty fancy."

"There was a van-load of furniture before the door," Miss Orme continued; "such delicious furniture, all new, from Maple's in London. She is evidently well-off, and going to do things nicely. Dinner-parties would be out of the question in such a tiny house; but there might be four o'clock teas, there might be charming teas this winter."

The ladies of Clyst were almost as pleased as Chrystal herself when, at last, she moved into the Nutshell, and set up housekeeping. They looked for her, next Sunday, in church, but she was not to be seen; and Miss Orme discovered, on Monday, that no application had been made by her yet for a sitting in the church of St. Osyth.

Before the week closed, Dr. Endecott, the principal doctor of the place, received a note from Mrs. Dampier asking him to attend her little girl, who was very unwell. He went immediately. When his professional visit

was over, and the child was being taken out of the drawing-room, Chrystal said to him :

"She is a frail-looking little dear, but she is stronger than she looks."

"Yes," assented the doctor; "I congratulate you on that. But it is a sad misfortune for Mr. Dampier and for you."

"You make a mistake," answered Chrystal quietly. "Etta's name is Yorke."

"Indeed? Married twice," pondered Dr. Endecott.

"No," said Chrystal. "Married only once. But my baby, who is coming"—She blushed brightly with pleasure and pride—"has a natural right to its father's name. I would not call the coming baby Yorke; nor could I call myself by one surname and it by another. Therefore I am Mrs. Dampier, for convenience sake only. But I make no false pretences; I wish it to be understood that I have no legal right to any surname except Yorke. And you, Dr. Endecott, in your professional rounds, have many opportunities of making this known; I shall be much obliged if you will, for I do not wish to receive any visits that would be regretted afterwards."

Dr. Endecott was so amazed that he bowed

himself out of the room, and drove away in his brougham, with only these facts clearly in his mind, and without having formed any opinion upon them.

He mentioned Chrystal's statement in each house that he called at. And then the chorus began. All the ladies said the same :

"What a vile woman! What an extraordinary woman!"

Yes, she was extra-ordinary, and therefore she was offensive to the ordinary. Her truthfulness and consideration for their feelings were as nothing in comparison with that. Even the name of her abode, the Nutshell, became an offence to them: it was odd; and there was, besides, a cheerfulness about it which they felt to be aggressive. They refused tacitly to use that name; and went on calling her dwelling "the empty house," in scornful defiance of the fact that Chrystal inhabited it.

Mrs. Endecott was the only lady who spoke like a human being on the subject of Mrs. Dampier. Dr. and Mrs. Endecott were a round, cosy, kind-hearted couple, past fifty years of age, and of good position in the town. They had no daughters.

"But that is terrible," said the matron, that

same evening, when she had heard her husband's story. "A young girl, not more than twenty, you say, and without a friend in the world!"

"She looks about twenty, but she may be rather more. And she appears quite content, I assure you, Jessie."

"Oh, Mervyn, I shall call upon her. She cannot live alone like that; she does not realise what the loneliness would be. If she is to live at Clyst at all, she must have one neighbour, one person to talk to sometimes. I shall call. A doctor's wife is like a clergyman's wife; it is her business to know everybody, whoever and whatever they may be; and I shall take my stand on that, if I am blamed."

But Mrs. Endecott was not greatly blamed. The ladies of Clyst said:

"Oh, well, she is the doctor's wife, and Dr. Endecott is attending there. I suppose he sent her. But, of course, she would not attempt to introduce the woman to us."

When Mr. Bouverie, the clergyman of Clyst, was told who his new parishioner was, he gave vent to an exclamation of horror, shuddered also, and said, with severity, that if

Mrs. Dampier were to present herself at the Lord's Table, he should refuse her the Sacrament. But another Sunday passed, and Mrs. Dampier stayed away from church. Then the Rev. Mr. Bouverie bethought him of why no application had been received from her for a sitting at St. Osyth's. This woman was living in open sin—or, rather, she bore within her the fruits of her sin; either she was too frivolous to care for religious ordinances, or else she was bowed down by shame; either she must be reprimanded and stricken with alarm, or else she must be dealt with mildly and encouraged to show herself at divine service. He was unmarried, so he could not send his wife; and, moreover, this visit ought to be a pastoral visit, which only a clergyman could pay.

So Mr. Bouverie sent in his card at the Nutshell, and waited for Mrs. Dampier to appear. He had prepared two entirely different styles of address, and was wondering which would be required; he knew of only two types of women "gone wrong"—the bold temptress and the sore-hearted victim; it was discomfiting to keep himself prepared to converse with either at a moment's notice,

especially as the drawing-room in which he was appeared suitable to neither. It was comfortable, home-like, and very pretty, but it showed no gaudiness or lavish luxury.

When the lady entered, the clergyman's perplexity became much greater, for he could not tell how to place her in his mind. She was young and beautiful—that was to be expected; but she was a woman of dignity and self-respect, who looked him straight in the eyes without coquetry. He spoke to her in a half-tone of concerned dejection, but she answered aloud with every-day composure; he alluded to her "fall," but she replied by asserting her "right." And, as the conversation proceeded, she had an argument for every argument of his.

"Where is your husband, madam?" asked Mr. Bouverie presently. "Are you suing to him for his forgiveness?"

"Not at all," said Chrystal. "We are separated finally, but his confidential valet has been in his service for many years, so I know he will be well cared for."

"And your—your — And Mr. Dampier, where is he? He has abandoned you, I suppose?"

"Oh, no, it was not a desertion, it was only a departure; it would not have suited either of us to live together."

Mr. Bouverie groaned.

"Would you have advised our continuing to live together?" asked Chrystal mischievously.

"Madam," said the clergyman, in desperation, "I can give no advice except that you should repent and throw yourself on the mercy of the Lord, who will in nowise cast out the most guilty sinner. And, to that end, I must exhort you to attend in His house on Sundays. You have not ventured to a place of public worship yet?"

"No," said Chrystal, "I have not gone. And I should be sorry, Mr. Bouverie, to take my opinions on the relationship between the sexes from the Bible. I find there a law that is polygamous."

"Oh!" gasped the clergyman, blushing to hear the word from her lips. "But that was under the Old Dispensation. We are Christians now, living under a New Dispensation which forbids polygamy."

"You mistake, I think," replied Chrystal. "Jesus Christ did not institute monogamy;

there is no mention of it in the Gospels. Nor in the Acts of the Apostles, or in their Epistles. Polygamy was flourishing in Palestine throughout the Bible times, and even as late as the victory by Titus over the Jews, and their dispersion among heathen nations."

Mr. Bouverie was much offended at this plain statement of fact, made by a member of the laity—and by an erring one—to a member of the cloth. He rose from his chair, and Chrystal rose also.

Poor man—so spare, so dolorous, so sombrely garbed, so under the dominion of men-made laws; and she—so fair, so courageous, so eager to discriminate real right from real wrong!

Chrystal had worn black after Etta's birth, but when she began to be happy in Switzerland, she dressed in colours again. She wore brown to-day, her nut-brown hair being a shade lighter, and her dark-grey eyes, whose gaze was gentle and direct, had a lurking fun in them.

"Religion is no guide, Mr. Bouverie," she said, with a smile; "and the women of the future are going to do without it."

Then she rang the bell, and Dinah was in attendance at the door to show the visitor out.

He was too overwhelmed to denounce her, or to shake hands with her, or to do anything except walk out quickly. Chrystal laughed lightly when he was gone, and had a game of play with Etta.

If religion were to be dropped, what would become of the clergy? Mr. Bouverie was professionally disturbed—as a brewer might be, if informed by a teetotaler that the women of the future were going to do without beer; or a butcher, if informed by a vegetarian that the women of the future were going to do without meat.

His encounter with “the fallen woman” had been a disappointment. Mr. Bouverie was a parson, but he was also a person; he liked to preach, but he also liked to know his neighbours’ affairs. He had expected her to throw herself at his feet—if not actually, metaphorically—and to sob out a full confession; but at the next tea-party, he would have nothing to tell. Who was this Mr. Yorke? Who was this Mr. Dampier? What part of England did Mrs. Dampier come from? He had nothing—nothing to tell.

Except that he had been personally insulted. Chrystal had spoken against his religion, and a lack of accuracy in his mind made him fancy that therefore she had insulted himself.

As a matter of fact, it was the other way about: he had called her "an evil liver," "a fallen woman," and, by implication, "a guilty sinner;" but she had not called him any bad names at all.

CHAPTER X.

"IT is a girl, Mrs. Dampier, and a splendid baby," said Dr. Endecott. "You have borne the pain like a heroine, and now here is your reward."

A little flannel bundle was presented to her. Chrystal kissed the soft red face, cuddled the infant to her breast, and, for the first time in her life, rapture filled her heart.

Chrystal did what the law compelled her to do in registering the new child's birth, but further than that she would not go in the direction of forms and ceremonies.

"Vera receives her name from myself," she said to Mrs. Endecott, "and it would be folly for me to ask Mr. Bouverie to give it to her."

"But, my dear, there must be a christening.

You would wish her to be admitted into the fold of Christ's Church?"

"Oh, no," said Chrystal decidedly. "I am not at all sure that Vera will choose to become a Christian when she grows up. If she does, she can be baptised then, and the ceremony will have some reality in it; but until she is of full age, the ceremony could be nothing but a sham."

Chrystal Dampier's recovery was rapid, and she gave herself enthusiastically to life—domestic, athletic, and intellectual.

The events of the next two and a half years were not many.

The Clystians, as she called them, could not be satisfied without knowing her secrets: she had told the antecedents which concerned herself, but had kept silence about those which concerned Yorke and Dampier; so Miss Orme wrote letters innumerable to acquaintances all over England and the Continent, and Mrs. Fotheringham and Mrs. Kniveton and others helped in the research. It was Miss Orme who succeeded.

"I have found out all about that Mrs. Dampier!" she announced, one winter after-

noon, at a large tea-gathering in the Fotheringhams' house.

"Oh, tell us, tell us!"

"Well, she comes from Merlemere, in Eastshire. She is very well connected; her husband is Mr. Yorke, of Yorke Hall, in Blackwater, Northumberland," said Miss Orme, referring, from time to time, to some letters which she held in her hand, "and he has, or had, an estate in Merlemere too, called Stackstead Grange. It is disposed of now, of course. Her mother is dead; I suppose grief killed her."

"Ah, yes, of course."

"Her only sister is Lady Tollemache, married to Sir Victor Tollemache; and her brother is Lieutenant Gervas Beresford, of the Rifles. Awful, is it not?"

"Awful indeed!" said the company. "What a disgrace for them!"

"They have cut her, of course?"

Yes, they had cut their sister. Sylvia was praying for her, and Gervas was shrugging his shoulders.

"And the man? Mr. Dampier?"

"Not a Mr. Dampier at all, my dear! He is Captain Dampier, of the Royal Artillery!"

"Captain? But why did she always call him Mr.?"

Chrystal had not done so; it was they themselves who had done it. When she mentioned him, it was as "My baby's father."

"Oh, why! Because those disreputable kind of women always tell falsehoods. The truth is not in them."

"But tell us all about it, dear Miss Orme. Where did she meet this Captain Dampier?"

"Oh, he was staying at Hautayne Castle," Miss Orme related, shuffling the letters on her lap. "Yes, here it is—and was introduced to her by Lord and Lady Hautayne. Then the flirtation became so acute, in the poor husband's absence (he was with his sick mother in Italy), that Lady Hautayne turned him out of her house; she says she felt she could not be responsible for it. So then the couple went off together, and lived in Switzerland until the man deserted her. They always do, you know."

"Of course, of course! And where is he now?"

"Oh, he went back to India when his leave was up. What else could she expect?"

"What, indeed?" said Mrs. Fotheringham.

"An officer in the artillery — how very awful!"

Though why Captain Dampier's being an artillery-officer made it more awful than it would otherwise have been, Mrs. Fotheringham did not explain.

The whole company approved the sentiment. Some repeated gravely, "An officer in the artillery—how very awful!" and not one of them was aware of the idiocy of the remark.

The Endecotts' house was the only house open to Chrystal; she often went in there, choosing the morning hours, to avoid callers. Miss Orme could not rest until she had been in the same room with this "bad woman," so she dropped in at Mrs. Endecott's, one morning, after having seen Mrs. Dampier enter, and then hurried off to describe her adventure in the various houses of Clyst.

"My dear, she has a face of brass. There she sat, looking at me just as coolly as I looked at her. And there was Mrs. Endecott calling her Chryssie; and I heard her kiss her in the passage. We all know what Mrs. Endecott is; she carries good-nature to the

verge of impropriety, and so I told her before I came away."

"Very good! You did quite right!" said Miss Orme's hearers.

They did not ask nor even wonder what answer Mrs. Endecott had made. The conservative mind contents itself with one side of a subject; that is, apparently, as much as it can grasp.

"I was longing to speak to the woman," said Miss Orme, "longing to let her know that I know all about her, and to mention Mr. Yorke, and Captain Dampier, and the Tollemaches—just to see if I could make her blush. But it would never have done; I should have had her bowing to me in the streets, if I had once spoken to her. That kind of person would be certain to insist upon an acquaintance."

Eventually the information reached Captain Dampier, in India, that a Mrs. Yorke was living at Clyst, in the Midlands, under his surname, and that she had a baby girl who bore it also. The news astounded him, and made him very angry. It was abominable of Chrystal to have compromised him so! He had never doubted that she would do what is

customary. There was a want of decency about her action—by which he meant a variation from the usual course. He was engaged to be married, and he hastened the wedding-day, lest the scandal should get round to the young lady's family before she had been made safely his.

The next event connected with Chrystal was an announcement in the *Times* of the death of Peregrine Yorke, Esq., of Yorke Hall, Blackwater, Northumberland. This happened when she had been living in Clyst two years, and the notice was read in many households. The Clystian mind, fastening itself as usual on trifles, became less shocked at Chrystal's absence from her husband's deathbed than at her not putting on crape for him: the former circumstance was only "heartless" — "and very likely," as Miss Orme said, "Mr. Yorke would not have let her come if she had offered"—but the latter was an abstention from their habits, and it seemed like an outrage directed against themselves; they judged it, therefore, to be far worse.

Life at the Nutshell went on evenly and almost happily. Chrystal had given Etta an

inefficient father, and she was naturally punished; she had chosen Vera's father more wisely, and she was naturally rewarded. The two children, taking their airings in a double perambulator, presented an object-lesson to the Clystians; but it was a lesson that they never learned. They grudged the illegitimate child its stout limbs and rosy cheeks, they pitied the legitimate child for being contaminated by its presence. Without a legal surname, and unbaptised—such a baby as Vera had no right to breathe the air! Fixing their attention on what was unimportant, on legality rather than on strength and happiness, they found the legal one who suffered a pleasanter object in their eyes than the illegal one who enjoyed.

Chrystal made her life as varied as she could. She was not allowed to be a subscriber to the town Library and Reading-Room, but she had a collection of books, different from any collection in Clyst, and read much. She made a sketch of Upcleve village, sitting on a camp-stool in the Upcleve Road, at a distance from her house; and the ladies considered that a forward thing to do, although, if the Miss Knivetons had done it

it would have been quite correct, and if Miss Fotheringham had done it it would have been positively meritorious! She rode a bicycle in knickerbockers; and more decent she looked than the other lady-riders, for the knickerbockers kept in place and their skirts did not. She took her family to the seaside every summer.

Nearly three years had gone by since Chrystal Dampier came to Clyst, and she had no thought of a move. "Moving would be useless," she said to herself. "I should meet with the same treatment everywhere."

CHAPTER XI.

SHE was not quite content in her Nutshell.

A grown-up person requires grown-up companionship.

The ladies of Clyst still declined to know Mrs. Dampier. Not only she was improper and impenitent, but she was all wrong; she had brought no introductions, she had never once entered their church, and she had insulted their clergyman! She was daringly different from them. She was unpardonably different. They still passed her in the roads with a stare that appeared not to see; they still called her abode "the empty house."

Only the Endecotts were friendly. Dr. and Mrs. Endecott did not feel greatly shocked at Chrystal Dampier's theories; they had heard them before from a relative of theirs; and though her practice had

shocked them at first, they could not help being fond of both Chrystal and Vera. But while they listened kindly, and were tolerant, they always differed. Chrystal had developed into what she was, quite unhelped: in her whole life's experience, she had never been in contact with a congenial mind; and now her nature called for that solace.

In an age which is so markedly a transition-age as ours, the New Woman cannot be born ready-made. She is not a sudden creation, she is the product of evolution, and sometimes of painful evolution. But Chrystal was not a person in whom two contrary influences live by struggling for existence, the worse mastering the better, and the better condemning the worse. This experience must be very uncomfortable; there was a oneness in her character which preserved her from it. All her contest had been against outer influences. She had evolved, not through self-conflict, but in the course of time: the girl, in preparing for her womanhood, had been the mother of the woman; and the woman, looking back upon her girlhood, felt as a mother to the girl.

Now, at twenty-five, she remembered her

question at fourteen, and knew its answer. The question was not, Why had she been born?—the answer to that came simply enough; she had been born in consequence of the satisfying of her parents' instincts. The question was, What had she been born for? Finding herself in the world, a new person who had never lived before, but who was obliged to live then, she had wanted to know what was to be the purport of her existence. Mrs Yorke had pointed her to motherhood; she had said nothing about men and women's love—how could she, since the lover whom she intended for the girl was Peregrine? But Chrystal could answer the question for herself now. It is the cultivation of *all* the faculties that makes a human being complete. The passions, the affections, the physical, mental, and moral powers, must all be exercised. She had children, two acquaintances, books, and active enjoyment; but she could not be content. The New Woman wanted the New Man.

Thus, as she progressed through life, one requirement after another made itself felt. And each had a right to be satisfied.

It was then that Chrystal became restless,

and began to think of moving. Surely, somewhere in the world, there must be new men as well as new women? If not in the country, in London? She had often foreseen a move when Etta and Vera grew up: as children, they could be companions for each other, and she could educate them at home; their case did not press. But she—she—day by day, she yearned for the rare masculine who could be to her a sympathetic friend, a real lover, a true husband.

It was in the July of that year that the Endecotts received the offer of a visit from the doctor's half-brother.

Notwithstanding the difference in their ages — Argent Endecott was thirty — the brothers had an attachment for each other; but they seldom met, for Argent was a successful author and lived principally out of England. His offer to run down to Clyst for a week was accepted gladly, and he arrived by an afternoon train, in time to prepare for the late dinner.

After dinner, the weather being sultry, Mrs. Endecott proposed their sitting out of doors, and the gentlemen smoked cigars in her company in the garden.

"You will be very much run after for lawn-tennis," observed Mrs. Endecott, in one of the pauses. "The Fotheringhams give a party to-morrow, and I have an invitation for you."

Mr. Endecott stretched himself, as if the mention of it were wearisome.

"Are there many changes in Clyst society, since I was here last, Jessie?"

"No. Miss Fotheringham is engaged to be married, but the Miss Knivetons are still to be had."

"Thank you. Or I had better use the French *Merci*, which can be made to signify, 'No, thank you.'"

"When are you going to marry, Argent?" asked Mrs. Endecott pleasantly. She was fond of this young brother of her husband's, whose coming always brightened them up. "Travelling continually, as you do, and living in hotels, you must have a good choice of young ladies."

"A large choice. It would be easy to choose them by the dozen, or the score, or the hundred, for they are all on the same pattern."

"Oh, surely you exaggerate. You must

meet enormous numbers of new people—ladies—in the course of one year only.”

“I assure you, Jessie, what I say is true. The faces are different, the voices are different, the costumes are different, but the actions and opinions are alike. These ladies have the same political shibboleths, the same social shibboleths, the same theological shibboleths. They all read, or avoid reading, the same literature. They all go to church on Sundays, deny themselves many week-day employments, and then complain that Sunday is dull; they all do fancy-work for charities; they all serve up the Royal Family, in conversation, at every meal; after having bowed to their acquaintances at lunch-time and said good morning, they all bow to their acquaintances again at dinner-time and say good evening. No amount of repetition tires them. They keep an eye on each other’s daily movements, and report their own. They ask each other, ‘Have you been out?’ as if it were the whole duty of mankind to take a daily walk; they ask it many times a day, and all the year round, until I am sickened by the sound of the words. There are hundreds—thousands of Englishwomen such as

I describe. They are like sheep, like parrots. If I marry one of them, she will set up the Sheep and the Parrot as an ideal for my daughters. I am a new man, Jessie and Mervyn, and I want a new woman."

They laughed at his vigorous description.

"But," said Dr. Endecott, "if we are to trust to the newspapers, the New Women are abounding just now. How have you missed them in your wanderings?"

"I have met a few individuals so-called, and I prefer them to the others; what strikes me most forcibly, however, is not their advance but their incompleteness. They are of varieties of inconsistency."

"Tell us about them, Argent," said his sister-in-law. "It would amuse me to hear what they are like."

"Well, I know a New Woman, young, who dresses in the latest fashion of coat, waistcoat, shirt, and cravat; and who rides a bicycle (albeit in a skirt), to the consternation of her parish clergyman—yet she teaches in the Sunday-school."

"We have that kind in Clyst," smiled Mrs. Endecott.

"I know a New Woman, also young, who

wears knickerbockers for gymnastics and bicycling—yet she spends her evenings in theatres or ball-rooms under the chaperonage of her mother. I know a New Woman, in her prime, who cuts her hair short and smokes—yet she is strictly Conservative in politics. I know a New Woman, middle-aged, who makes speeches on platforms in public halls, and who writes advocating equal celibacy for men and women before marriage—yet she is delicate in appearance, nervous in manner, and always femininely dressed. And I even know a New Woman who negatives religion, and has entered openly into a Free Union with a man of her own choice—yet she is neither a bicyclist, nor a smoker, nor a swimmer, nor does she play cricket or football. Each of these is scandalised at the others because they overstep the line that prejudice or temperament has made her draw. Each of them prides herself on being ‘the really nice woman.’ But, oh,” said Mr. Endecott, in an earnest concentrated voice—“But, oh, for a Free Marriage with a Newer than they! developed bodily, advanced morally, consistent and complete! That rare feminine is yet to seek.”

There was a silence. Dr. and Mrs. Endecott exchanged glances. Then the doctor said, in a lazy tone, watching to see the effect of his words:

"Argent, that Newest Woman is living at your gates. I will introduce you to her to-morrow."

Mr. Endecott reddened considerably, and then broke into a low laugh.

"A climax followed by a bathos!" he exclaimed. "First the grand announcement, and then the promise of a formal introduction! Dear old Mervyn"—stretching out his hand—"can I not tell her with my own tongue that I am your brother?"

CHAPTER XII.

EVEN the first meeting of the New Man and Woman could not accomplish itself without offence to the Olden People.

"If we pick these dear roses for our pleasure, Etta," Mr. Endecott heard a voice say, as he came near to the Nutshell's garden, "we must treat them well. We must not crush them together, nor let them lie about to fade, but keep them in fresh water that they may enjoy themselves. They give us pleasure, and we have a duty to them in return. Even flowers have their rights, because they can feel."

"Yes," assented Etta, to as much as she could understand.

She was holding a basket for the roses that her mother was cutting off.

Mr. Endecott stayed his steps, and listened

to the little homily, which had been spoken by Chrystal partly to the child and partly to herself.

"Will you let me say that I agree with you, Mrs. Dampier?" said a stranger's voice, over the low hedge, surprising Chrystal without startling her. And then the stranger raised his hat, opened the gate, and introduced himself.

Lady and gentleman stood talking together on the lawn. In a few minutes, she invited him in to breakfast with her.

How shocking!

"That outrageous woman has got hold of Mr. Endecott," exclaimed the younger Miss Kniveton vexedly, as she took her place at the family breakfast-table. "He only arrived last evening, and I saw her take him into the house just now—at half-past eight o'clock in the morning! I saw it with my own eyes, I do assure you."

"Oh, my dear," said Mrs. Kniveton, "a person like that would pick up a gentleman out of the highways and byways."

"But Mr. Endecott is well known in Clyst——"

"Never mind," interrupted the young lady's

mother; "you will see him at tennis, at the Fotheringhams', this afternoon. And, however lax a gentleman may be himself, take my word for it, he likes to have a wife who is correct."

The inside of this Nutshell seemed very nice to Mr. Endecott. The dining-room, in which they breakfasted, was small, and Etta and Vera sat at table; but both Argent and Chrystal noticed, with a silent pleased amusement, that there was just comfortable space for the man who had come. Mrs. Dampier left him after the meal, and he occupied himself in her drawing-room by examining the bookshelves. He found there many works which other ladies whom he knew boasted of never reading—the newest thought of the day, scientific, heretical, etc.—and also books of travel and of imagination. Chrystal returned presently, and they sat down and conversed.

"You have seen both my little girls, Mr. Endecott," she said, beginning with frankness on the subject that was in his thoughts, "Henrietta Yorke and Vera Dampier. People say that I ought to be ashamed of Vera, and that I should consider Etta as a creditable

misfortune. But Vera is my Pride, and Etta is—I say it with sorrow and shame—my Crime. Her suffering hurts me; it does more, it reproaches me. What is your opinion, Mr. Endecott?”

She raised her eyes to his, seeking sympathy, and hoping for it at last.

“I cannot gainsay you, Mrs. Dampier,” he answered gravely. “I think, with you, that parenthood has great responsibilities, and that health is the most elementary benefit which a mother owes her child.”

Chrystal had waited years for agreement, and the tears came into her eyes as she now heard it.

“I could not undo the harm that I had done,” she explained unsteadily, “so I thought to do some good to place beside it. I wanted to do this, I longed to do it, I felt that I must do it—for the satisfaction of my heart as well as of my conscience.”

“I understand,” said Argent, and held out his hand. “You have been happier since Vera came?”

“Oh, much happier; though the Christians and Clystians have done what they could to prevent. I am quite out of society—

that I expected; but I did not expect persecution."

"Have they persecuted you?"

"It was attempted by the clergyman. Mr. Bouverie called on my landlord, and asked him to cancel my lease. Mr. Bouverie also interviewed my servants: but one of them is a staid elderly person, who knows when she has a comfortable well-paid place, and she refused to leave; Dinah's mother did threaten to remove her, but I settled that," smiled Chrystal, "by paying a couple of pounds higher wages than she would get elsewhere in Clyst, and Dinah is very pleased with her situation now."

"But you have had no personal insults, I hope?"

"I have had annoyances. Young Mr. Fotheringham always walks straight at me, obliging me to step off into the road to pass him. And he used to saunter round the hedge, at dusk, staring at the windows and whistling and making queer noises; but I spoke to the policeman, who gave him a hint, I suppose, for he left it off directly. My persecutions have not been tragic," said Chrystal, smiling. "And I am not depressed.

You see, I have a sweet little home of my own; and the Endecotts have been very kind to me."

Argent's heart stirred hotly within him, as he heard how this young creature had been treated because she had chosen to propagate wellness illegitimately instead of propagating illness legitimately.

He spent the greater part of the morning with her. She was gracious, bright, and confiding; and he looked with a fond admiration as she bent her head over a frock that she was making for one of her little girls. Chrystal was plainly dressed; her jewels had been left at Stackstead Grange, and she had kept only a few ornaments given by the Yorkes in her girlish days; but Argent Endecott thought her fresh cream cambric gown was quite the prettiest garment he had ever seen.

Chrystal Dampier's story, as told by Dr. and Mrs. Endecott the evening before, had been scarcely credible to him. He had no more respect for the law than she had; he admired the motive which had made her become Vera's mother; he did not wonder at her having selected Vera's father without loving him, for he knew that her choice must

have been limited at Merlemere; but he found it strange that she could have lived two months in intimate relations with the man of her selection without growing to love him, and stranger that she should have lived singly in Clyst for years without regretting him. Mrs. Endecott had not been able to explain this; Chrystal had not tried to explain it to her. She was conservative herself, and she could not have understood that, although the advanced ones of the world may be admired for their talents, and even fallen in love with by the backward ones, the backward can never attract the full love of the advanced. She mistook Chrystal's indifference for a concession to legal and social conventions; she thought that — perhaps without knowing it—Chrystal was ashamed of Dampier's episode, and wished to forget him. Mr. Endecott had not accepted the explanation.

During this making-acquaintance visit, Chrystal was the talker. She talked much of her childhood and youth at Merlemere; she spoke warmly of Mrs. Yorke, and of Peregrine with a pity that had some affectionateness in it; but when she reached the

subject of Captain Dampier—and Argent's interest became most intense—her voice was unconcerned, critical, and had a tone of raillery. She told little anecdotes of him. She mimicked his farewell to her. "I could have loved him if he had been different," finished Chrystal; and there was no need to add anything more.

"Are you living contentedly at Clyst now?" was Endecott's next question.

"Vera contented me," she replied.

He felt a joyous thrill because she did not use the present tense. There is no affectation between the New, and therefore there cannot be misunderstandings.

"May I come again—often?"

"Oh, yes, come every day."

Mr. Endecott walked back to his brother's house thoughtfully. It still seemed wonderful to him that such a magnificent young woman, twenty-five years of age, had never been in love. And it was exceptional. If Chrystal had stayed on with Peregrine, either as wife or friend, and after his death lived alone with his child or children, the natural demand would have made itself felt soon; but her heart was so satisfied by successful

motherhood, that it had kept the sexual passion in abeyance until now.

Life is not always disappointing. The unexpected comes sometimes when it is wanted.

Through and through, Argent Endecott was a good man. And clever also. He was not as distinguished-looking as Captain Dampier; his features were not so regularly handsome; but he was taller than Chrystal, strong, well-grown, virile, and his sun-browned face had comeliness; there were intonations in his voice that she liked, there was a directness in his manner that pleased her. And above and beyond all this, he understood her, he approved her, he agreed with her. She had found her mate at last!

CHAPTER XIII.

THE Fotheringhams were the great family of Clyst, and they had a beautiful house, with grounds, at the opposite end of the town from the Upcleve Road end. It was there that Mr. Endecott was due, at five o'clock this hot July afternoon, to play tennis.

It was a delightful scene: the red-bricked house, adorned with creepers in blossom; the green, green lawn; the active game, which displayed the figures of those who were playing it; the ladies, tastefully dressed, refined, educated, some of them clever at music, at painting, at wood-carving, at art needlework—they were among the best that present-day conservatism can produce. But in the mental and moral departments, what

monotony! It was that that spoiled the scene for Mr. Endecott, and made him tired of the entertainment before it had thoroughly begun.

Chrystal Dampier had been exquisitely natural. These people were behaving according to rule. They smiled all the time, whether they felt amused or not, they smiled because society required it; they talked all the time, not because they had anything to say, but because it was the expected thing to do.

Chrystal Dampier had asserted some ideas of right and wrong, which were her own, and for which she had given good reasons. These people prattled of sin and duty, but their application of the words was trivial, acquired, and was passed without demur from one person to another. As the afternoon wore on, Endecott heard around him remarks which he had often heard before; they were familiar to conservative tongues, and therefore satisfactory to the conservative ears:—
“It is a *duty* to make ourselves agreeable”—
“It is *wicked* to play cards on Sundays”—
“It is a *sin* to be indoors in such lovely weather”—“We *ought* to call on the So-and-

Sos; they called on us last." These sayings exasperated him. They were a parody of ethics.

Chrystal Dampier's words about the flowers had been clearly true—the very first words he ever heard her speak. But Endecott could see a group of ladies and gentlemen who were teasing a pet dog, tantalising it with biscuits, and making it perform unnatural tricks. He was disgusted with their behaviour. The dog had no faults while the humans had many, the dog's sense of dignity was stronger than theirs; yet they believed that animals existed only for their profit or their pleasure, and that they might treat them almost anyhow they chose. The new conception of rights, which includes all things that have any feeling, would seem strained and laughable to the older conscience.

To such people, Chrystal must be singular. To such people, it is the simple and the true that is the "extraordinary."

Mrs. Fotheringham, the great lady of the place, held Mr. Endecott somewhat out of favour; he had deviated from Clystian practices, that morning, and was to be

lectured for it at tea-time. Everybody knew of this except Endecott himself. So, at the conclusion of the games, when her guests had assembled near her, and were supplied with tea, claret-cup, and delicate eatables, their hostess began.

"We are very pleased to see you in Clyst again, Mr. Endecott — delighted, I may say; but we do all hope that you will not try to combine our acquaintance with the acquaintance of that — ahem! — person who lives in the empty house."

"I beg your pardon? In an empty house?" said Mr. Endecott, with great surprise.

"Well, it used to be empty," said Mrs. Fotheringham testily, and colouring. "In the Upcleve Road. She has given it a most fantastic name—The Nutshell! Because she wants to make herself and it conspicuous, I suppose. She goes in for being original. 'Let us be original, whatever we are!' is always the cry of bold and improper women."

Mrs. Fotheringham laughed satirically.

"Yes." "Yes." "Very true," murmured

several voices. And there were various other satirical laughs round the circle.

"I am speaking quite in friendship, Mr. Endecott," the lady continued. "Carry Kniveton saw you in the garden there before breakfast. Of course, gentlemen can do anything and go anywhere, and you are not a resident in Clyst; and Dr. Endecott attends her, and Mrs. Endecott is good-nature itself; but nobody else, with any self-respect, ever speaks to Mrs. Yorke—Dampier."

Mrs. Fotheringham's stumble over the two names was intentional.

Mr. Endecott happened to be standing, with a cup in his hand, at her right side, and the chorus were ranged in chairs at her left, commanding an excellent view of the culprit. He put down his cup on the table, and straightened himself. He had not "the grace to blush," as they had hoped; but a redness of offence and surprise mounted to his forehead. He felt incredulous for a moment. What was astonishing was that these cultured people, whose speciality it was to be well-bred, were unaware that they were taking a

liberty which did not properly belong to them. But Endecott remembered immediately that he was new, that they were old, and that his thoughts were not as their thoughts nor his ways as their ways. Interference with the freedom of the individual was not an insolence in their opinion, it was one of their queer "duties;" those who walk in grooves are always on the watch to drag stragglers back into the grooves; with one accord, these ladies and gentlemen would praise Mrs. Fotheringham and themselves, because they had done what in them lay to keep Mr. Endecott and Mrs. Dampier apart.

"I admire Mrs. Dampier more than any lady I have ever met," was his terse answer.

This was "one" for Miss Carry Kniveton, and Mrs. Fotheringham was not displeased at it.

"You admire her? Oh, yes, we were prepared for that. Mrs. Dampier is undeniably handsome—we grant her that, for as much as it is worth. But you will allow, I am sure, that there are qualities more valuable than beauty. And when a lady loses her character——"

"Mrs. Dampier could never lose her character," interrupted Endecott bluntly. "It was born with her, has grown with her, and will not leave her till she dies."

Many of his hearers looked bewildered, but Mrs. Fotheringham was not as dense as they.

"Well, Mr. Endecott, since you are so particular about words, I will say—when a lady loses her reputation——"

"Madam," interposed the gentleman firmly, "Mrs. Dampier must always be of most fair repute with those who understand and can appreciate her—and the others do not matter."

This was staggering.

Carry Kniveton grew pale with disappointment. The contempt of this desirable man was not for the woman whom she and other ladies had been despising ; it was for her and them.

"Of course," recommenced Mrs. Fotheringham suavely, after a pause, "we know that gentlemen allow themselves a great deal of latitude, but even they draw the line somewhere. And, of course, you would never stoop to such a person as we are speaking

of. I mean that you would never marry such a person."

The opinions of Conservatives are ready-made opinions, made for them before their birth, and this accounts for their reiterative use of the phrase "of course." It is seldom used by advanced people, because they form and modify their own opinions as they move on.

"And why not?"

"Oh, Mr. Endecott, excuse me, but you are speaking foolishly. You do not realise what Mrs. Dampier is. She is capable of anything. She is capable of asking you to marry her!"

"And why not?" said Endecott again.

What an astounding question! Was Mr. Endecott ignorant of woman's past, in countries all over the world? Or were those past centuries to be of no importance in the future?

"Women propose to men!" Mrs. Fotheringham reddened with irritated temper, and turned an appealing look on the female part of the chorus.

Some shuddered, some blushed, some tossed their heads.

“So horrible!” “So unheard-of!” “So very new!” “So unwomanly!”

“So unnatural!” added Carry sweetly.

Endecott looked across at her, and smiled a smile of kindly sarcasm; he thought it deplorable that the girl should be in ignorance of her own nature. She was evidently confusing the habitual with the instinctive, the unpermitted with the involuntary. And he was not mistaken; for, if society had been accustomed to allow and to applaud such actions, Carry Kniveton would have proposed to him on the spot.

“It is so natural,” he answered her, “that it is done in despite of all regulations and prejudices to the contrary; and done much oftener than you would—any of you—credit. It has happened to several public men; I know an actor who has received three offers of marriage; and I have been told of six other cases in private life. There must be very many more that have not come within my knowledge. The ladies who proposed—generally by letter—were ordinary ladies, some fashionable, some domestic, but none with any claim or wish to be called new.

Thus does nature triumph secretly over restraints!"

"But were they accepted or refused, Mr. Endecott?" asked Miss Fotheringham.

"Two were refused, and four accepted. One of the marriages has turned out exceedingly happily, and the rest are average."

"But, oh, I should think the rejected ladies must have died of shame!"

"They did not die. And do you think a man feels no mortification when he is rejected?"

"A man? Oh, yes. But it is not so mortifying for a man; it must be far worse for a woman!"

"And when Mrs. Dampier proposes to you, Mr. Endecott, shall you say yes or no?" asked Miss Carry Kniveton pertly.

He drew himself up at once, and answered:

"That is private."

Tears of vexation filled Carry's eyes as she saw that she had offended the man she loved.

"It was too bad of Mrs. Fotheringham to let out that it was I who saw Mr. Endecott and told of him," she said afterwards, to her family. "If Minna were not engaged to Mr.

Lockhart, I should say that she had done it to spite me."

And Mrs. Fotheringham had done it to spite her; for there were several young ladies who wanted Mr. Endecott, and Carry Kniveton was not her favourite.

Mrs. Endecott had told her brother-in-law that she would not wait dinner for him, so that he might stay and dine at the Fotheringhams' if invited. But he did not stay, although Mrs. Fotheringham invited him. He walked to the Nutshell instead, and dined with Chrystal Dampier.

He was thoughtful as he walked.

When a lady loses her conservative reputation, she ceases to be a lady and sinks into a mere person — that is the conservative argument. The unfit ought not to breed — this is a truth, and it should be a truism. But law, religion, and society say: "Let the unfit breed, provided they fulfil certain arbitrary requirements of ours; and let the fit abstain, as long as they do not fulfil them." The old and the new Womanhood are at variance here. And both have their martyrdoms: the Olden Woman is made to

suffer—by celibacy, or by the over-production of children which prostrates her strength; the New Woman is made to suffer—by contumely, detraction, and hatred. Which is the happier?

CHAPTER XIV.

“DID you have a pleasant time at Mrs. Fotheringham’s?” asked Chrystal, as she and her guest were sitting in the drawing-room after dinner.

He answered, with a low laugh :

“Oh, Mrs. Dampier, you lose nothing—nothing by being excluded from those precincts. The function was a lamentable success. The merry-makers diligently repeated the same chitter-chatter that I heard them repeat three years ago, reminding me of musical-boxes, wound up to play a certain number of certain tunes and to stop after a certain interval. What enjoyment can there be under an ordinance which constrains people to smile in certain places and talk at certain hours? Society is intolerable to me.

To escape it, I travel about and live in hotels."

"That must be delightful," said Chrystal, "for it enables you to see this beautiful world of ours."

He smiled.

"You have not made the usual comment. The usual comment is—'It is so wise of you, as an author, to live in hotels, because you get so many opportunities of studying individualities of character.' I do not study them, for the reason that there are none to study; I hear around me the same things said, and the self-same wording used. I have a private sitting-room, but occasionally I descend into the public rooms to read a newspaper. If anyone, coming in, finds me there by myself, the regulation-remark is—'What, all alone!' in a commiserating tone; and often it is put interrogatively—'Are you alone?' which deprives it of every modicum of sense. If an hotel-acquaintance informs me that she has met somebody who knows some relations or friends of hers, the regulation-answer to be made is—'Yes, the world is very small, after all!' If I say anything different from that, her ear misses the

accustomed sound, and she thinks me a strange and unsatisfactory person. But what irritates and confounds me most is the universal prevalence of the query, 'Have you been out?' I only join the company at lunch and dinner, otherwise I must reply to that question, not five or six times a day all the year round, but tens and scores of times a day! The English ladies have made this repetition their national custom—or, at all events, they have made it the custom of our class; and the gentlemen are learning it from the ladies. If I answer 'No,' for several days consecutively, I am asked, in grave remonstrance, 'Do you never go out, Mr. Endecott?' How can a minority of one contend against a unanimous folly? I have tried declining to be questioned, but the result of that was great offence, and afterwards I overheard the questioners wondering 'whether Mr. Endecott, the author, was quite right in his head.'"

Chrystal laughed a merry outright laugh, refreshing to Endecott after the senseless laughs of complaisance that he had heard at the lawn-tennis party.

"But," said she, "are you literally in a minority of one?"

"Well," he answered, "in all the years of my hotel-life, there has been only a single instance of anyone's objecting to this habit. He was a rather silent man, and my common-sense told me that he was silent because, for reasons sufficient to himself, he preferred silence. But common-sense says little or nothing to people with pre-conceived ideas; and his neighbours treated him as though he were a Miss in her teens, longing to converse but too shy to venture. The first time he appeared at table, one of the ladies next to him began: 'Have you been out to-day?' He looked at her incredulously, and then replied: 'How could I have got here without going out?' At each meal, they asked him if he had been out, and if he said 'Yes,' the next question was, 'Where did you go?' Thus he was obliged to render an account of his movements, twice a day, to these strangers. This went on for weeks. He did not once address them of his own accord, he gave them snappish answers in a gruff voice, yet they never understood the hint. The natural

person talks sometimes, but the conventional person talks at times, because it is a certain hour by the clock, and these obeyers of convention were performing one of their fictitious duties; their conduct was extremely rude, but they thought they were showing an example of politeness. At last, he applied to the head-waiter to be placed at a small separate table, and asked me to join him there. We got on capitally. A 'Good morning' was the extent of our daily formality: each of us talked when inclined, but neither of us tried to make the other talk against his will; and we did not ask any prying questions. He was not really morose; he was a clever, interesting man. And we parted, very good friends."

Leaning back on a settee, Chrystal listened to the manly voice, saying little herself. Endecott was the only gentleman who had ever dropped into the Nutshell to chat with her. He was her first admirer since the "Good-bye, darling," that Captain Dampier had spoken. Chrystal caught herself repeating that "Good-bye, darling," to herself, and fancying how it would sound in Argent Endecott's voice; and then a strange pang

seized her heart, and the word "Good-bye" seemed dreary and sad as it had never been before.

Endecott's fingers strayed about a bowl of the roses which Chrystal had cut that morning.

"My last winter was spent on the Riviera," he said presently, "—that land of flowers. People used to bring quantities into the hotel, and stuff and crowd them into jugs; these jugs they put outside their rooms at night, and the powerful scent made the air in the corridors oppressive; the dying and dead vegetation was often not removed for several days. I noticed that the worst offenders in this treatment were always said to be 'so fond of flowers,' because of the quantity that they appropriated. I managed differently. I carry with me a small jar of rough earthenware, bought in the Azores; it is a miniature imitation of the water-jars used by the peasantry of Fayal; I put into this a few blossoms at a time, giving them plenty of space, air, and light. And when they began to fade, I burned them in my fireplace to prevent their infecting the air. I am glad to think that you and I were agreed before we knew each other."

The long summer-day was ending, and the dusk crept in and round the room. Chrystal, in her muslin gown of favourite white, looked shadowy to him, and when she stirred the movement sounded gently indistinct. Already these two were courting each other—by their looks that lingered, by the modulation of their voices, by the absolute contentment with which they sat together.

Dinah was rung for to light the lamps, and they finished the evening with music.

The clock in the entry struck half-past ten. Miss Orme, who lived alone in Clyst, would have dreaded what her neighbours might say if a gentleman were seen coming out of her house so late: Chrystal did not think of that; what she did think of was that the Endecotts kept moderate hours, and would be inconvenienced if their visitor tarried. So she said:

“I must send you away, Mr. Endecott,” and told him why. “But come again,” she added. “Come every day.”

She had said the same in the morning; but this second “Come every day” was not a permission, nor an acquiescence, it was an insistant wish.

Endecott walked home in starlight. The night felt warm and sensuous; and the sensuousness of his temperament, sanctioned by its morale, responded gladly.

Was Chrystal Dampier everything that he had searched for in a lover? She was beautiful, free in thoughts and actions, a brave woman, a pure woman, a true woman—true to the core. But there was one matter yet undiscovered. She had defied the law in Dampier's case: would she dispense with it in his? He would ask her that question to-morrow.

Chrystal could not sleep, that night. She was no budding girl, ready for she knew not what, yet timid of she knew not what; she was a woman who knew; and the amorousness of her rich nature, which had slumbered until twenty-five, sprang up now vitally importunate. Chrystal had had a legal husband; and she had had what is called an intrigue, though it was not an intrigue on her part; her inclination to Dampier had been only for a purpose, from which she had always disconnected him; he was nothing in her thoughts except Vera's father. Neither of these men had really loved her, and she

had not loved either of them. Therefore she gave to Argent Endecott a virgin heart.

Love is not enough, law is more important:—with all her power of loathing, she loathed that principle. Nay, even love with law was less good to her than love alone. What is it, in effect, that the law says? “There may come a time when you two will cease to love each other; and if it comes, and when it comes, you shall be bound—body to body, though not mind to mind and heart to heart.” Change is an incident of universal life; there should be no disgrace in change, the disgrace should be in hypocrisy. The legal marriage is immoral. The free marriage is the real marriage.

At noon, next day, Mr. Endecott and Mrs. Dampier walked to Upclevé together. A country road varies from season to season, and from hour to hour; and it varies from one beauty to another, from one interest to another. Talking with Chrystal gave Endecott the same species of enjoyment; she was unsophisticated, sunny-natured, and he did not know beforehand what she would say. At the first bend in the road, they came face to face with Miss Fotheringham,

her future husband, and the younger Miss Kniveton. Endecott raised his hat: Mr. Lockhart stared impudently, Minna averted her look scornfully, Carry blushed violently and hung her head. They passed on, and the two others sought each the other's glance and smiled. In her creamy dress and creamy hat, warmed by love, fun, and glowing sunshine, Chrystal was the fairest sight in Clyst.

Strolling along, Argent and she entered upon the most important conversation of their lives.

"I see that you have many new books, by new authors," began Endecott. "You have 'The Heavenly Twins,' 'A Superfluous Woman,' 'The Yellow Aster,' 'Gallia,' and 'Daughters of Danaus.' I have read them all, and the fault I find with them is that they are vague, and that they are pessimistically melancholy. The new woman-writer knows her wrongs, but she does not seem to know her rights. She is

' An infant, crying in the night,
And with no language but a cry.' "

"Yes," said Chrystal; "circumstances make the formation of the new writer a dismal,

painful process. Her state is preparatory, and she does not know yet what she is preparing for. She is feeling her feet, as they say of babies; by-and-bye she will stand alone, and walk alone, and run alone. She is babbling incoherently; she will soon articulate. She is pointing this way and that, but eventually she will find the road she means to take. Her critics complain that she has no humorousness. That is because she has been saddened by her grievances. But when the way becomes easier, and when a goodlier company are treading it, courage will make them merry, and they will find plenty of humour in the situation."

"The way," repeated Endecott. "One book, written by a man, shows the way distinctly. But it is worse than melancholy, it is tragic. The author says, 'Here you see the right road;' and the story adds, 'You dare not, must not, cannot walk in it.' And one review has aptly called the book 'a boomerang of a book.'"

"And yet," smiled Chrystal, radiant, "its very warning helps. Herminia Barton attempted too great a change; she wished to

remain Miss Barton, and to live apart with her child. This was a mistake: the new man and the new woman should live together and make a home, as long as the mutuality of their love lasts; and, for convenience, they and their children must use one surname. When her dead lover's father offered money for the infant, she refused it: that was another mistake; it is just that the child's support should come from both its parents; and in her case, it was necessary because she had no independent income. My Vera, my freedom, my pretty home, my peace of mind—all these I could secure because I had an income of my own. Dolly, when she grew up, did not care to be a martyr; she wanted easy living, amusements, and society without difficulties and disgrace; all this might easily have been hers if Herminia had possessed what I possess, and then she would not have cursed her mother. Etta and Vera shall have friends among new people. It is clear to me, Argent, that the poor cannot be reformers—or, if they are, it is through sacrifice and suffering unbearable."

"And the lesson, Chryssie?"

He stopped and faced her. Eyes gazed

into eyes, heart throbbed with heart, mind and conscience answered unto mind and conscience.

“Those who are able should go before and prepare the way for the unable. Shall we?” said Chrystal, putting both her hands into his.

CHAPTER XV.

"JESSIE, this is the lady who is to be Mrs. Argent Endecott."

Mrs. Endecott looked up from her knitting at the two young people standing in front of her, bright with happiness. She rose and kissed them.

"I am so glad—Mervyn will be so glad—everything will be right now that Chryssie is to be married!"

"It is to be a free marriage," said Endecott.

"Oh, Argent!"

"Neither of us would enter into any other."

"But she is a widow now, and can take a real husband."

"And I mean to," said Chrystal proudly.

"Is it love or law that makes a marriage real?" asked Endecott.

"Surely both. Look at Mervyn and me—there is no happier couple than we have

always been. Why not be like us? We have had our silver wedding, and we hope to celebrate our golden."

"And I, who know you," said Argent heartily, "know what that will mean to you and him. But, tied together as you are, the golden wedding, when it comes, can only prove that husband and wife have survived for fifty years, and that they have not been divorced. Law was not needed to keep Mervyn and you together; it has only been an impertinence. And it prevents your golden wedding from being a golden proof of constancy."

"Ah, well," said Mrs. Endecott, "right and wrong seem to have changed places since I was taught. But," she added, with a smile on her good-natured face, "love exists, for the old couple and the young."

The future was easily arranged. Chrystal had always received an ample allowance for Etta, through Mr. Yorke's lawyers; she had always borne the whole maintenance of Vera, and would continue to do so. The lease of the Nutshell expired in the autumn, and then they would move into a larger house in Clyst; for friendship they would have the Endecotts,

and Argent would invite his London acquaintances, from time to time, to visit them. The honeymoon was to be in Scotland, and Mrs. Endecott promised to supervise the children during their mother's absence. The marriage was to be on that day week.

An outcry, headed by the Fotheringhams, arose in Clyst against the promptitude of these arrangements. It was "so indecent." Yet, when Mr. Fotheringham proposed to Mrs. Fotheringham on the morning after their first meeting at a ball, his precipitation had been "so romantic," though founded on nothing but admiration of her person; and the wedding had only been postponed until the wedding-clothes were ready.

On the day before his marriage, Mr. Endecott was bidden to a garden-party at Mr. and Mrs. Fotheringham's. The Clystians were going to make one grand effort to reclaim him.

"Do they suppose I would go near them after they have cut you?" he said indignantly.

"It was you they cut, not me," answered Chrystal; "I have no acquaintance with them. You had better accept, or they will think you are ashamed to show yourself."

Endecott considered. Then:

"I will go," he said, "and I will speak some truths to them that they may never hear again."

"Never mind," Miss Kniveton was saying, at that moment, to her sister who was crying. "He will get tired of her, and will be sure to want a wife some day."

"What good will that do to me?" sobbed Carry. "They may stay together for years, and I shall be growing older and older!"

It was a large gathering at Mrs. Fotheringham's that afternoon. The three Endecotts arrived late, when the party were assembled round the tea-table, and a clatter of many voices reached them across the lawn as they advanced, for the professedly agreeable person avoids a pause as scrupulously as nature abhors a vacuum. They were received with distinction: Dr. and Mrs. Endecott had a solid position in Clyst, and were personally liked; they were not to be made responsible for the errors of their relative; and Mr. Endecott was as yet an interesting sinner to be mourned over, rescued, and treated indulgently ever after. So Mrs. Fotheringham placed Mrs. Endecott beside her, and Argent

was beset by smiles and handshakes. He was in an uncompromising mood, and went through his part of the business with a grave face.

"How charming this place looks," exclaimed Mrs. Endecott nervously.

"Charming weather and charming people," replied Mr. Fotheringham, "make it appear at its best."

"And our charming hostess who presides over us," added Dr. Endecott, bowing, "completes the scene."

"Thank you, doctor. I hope that I shall often have the pleasure of welcoming you here, and your wife, and your brother."

Mrs. Fotheringham looked at each in turn, and her eyes remained on the last-mentioned.

"My coming," said he, "must depend on your behaviour to Mrs. Argent Endecott. Miss Carry Kniveton, why did you cut me last Wednesday and yesterday again?"

Carry blushed crimson. She looked round for Minna, but Miss Fotheringham was engaged elsewhere.

"Oh, Mr. Endecott, how could I help it when you were—when you were——"

"Well, Miss Carry?"

"When you were walking with—walking with——"

"The lady who is to be my wife. I am to be married to-morrow."

"Is there to be any ceremony?" asked Mrs. Fotheringham anxiously.

"None whatever. But we intend to send an announcement to the marriage-column of the newspapers."

"No respectable paper will put it in," said Minna Fotheringham rudely.

"That is possible. But every change must have a beginning, and we are not afraid to begin. We look forward to a time when free marriages will be the rule, and tied marriages will be seen to be not moral. Nothing is final in natural life; nothing ought to be made final in social life."

"But, Mr. Endecott," said Mrs. Fotheringham vigorously, "have you ever thought what the practical result of this licentiousness will be? People will be marrying, as you call it, every day in the week!"

"They marry on every day except Sunday, at present," answered Endecott, amused. "You mean, I suppose, that people will re-marry, every day in the week. I do not think

you need to be afraid. A legal union is often thoughtlessly made up; beauty on one side, money on the other, and the thing is done: but the free union is not for support; it is not wanted without love and harmony of character. Therefore, it is not likely to be changed seven times a week."

"Mrs. Dampier has done pretty well already, for so young a woman," observed Mrs. Kniveton. "There will be quite a variety of surnames in your family. There is a little Yorke, a little Dampier, and the next will be a little Endecott. Each child by a different father! And not a whole brother or sister among them!"

It was the manner of this attack that made it detestable to Endecott. The matter of it was merely foolish: for there was, in fact, at Clyst, a family with three surnames—a widower having married a twice-married widow, and the children being only half-brothers and sisters, and of four different combinations of parentage; this family was represented by its chief members at the present scene, and they sat there without reproach. But the angry faces round him, the spiteful voices, the insolence of these

people's interference, made it difficult for Endecott to keep his temper under. Nevertheless, he answered drily :

"That happens sometimes under the legal-marriage system."

"She may have more surnames yet," tittered another lady. "There is to be absolutely no limit."

"And many legally-married women have more, whose husbands have happened to die or to be divorced. There is absolutely no limit."

"But I thought—I am sure I have heard it said, or read it somewhere," spoke someone else, "that the New Women object to being mothers. At Mrs. Dampier's rate, however, they will think nothing of a dozen apiece!"

"I have heard of legal families larger than that," retorted Endecott coolly. "I have even heard of more than twenty children by the same father and mother. How monotonous! What a poor chance it gives for originality of character! Far better will the chance be under free marriage. Instead of a very artificial selection of parents—a selection restricted by class prejudice, by legal prejudice, and by religious prejudice—we shall

have natural selection, and consequent variety which tends to superiority. But the New Parents recognise a limit where the Olden Parents do not; they think it wrong to produce sons and daughters helter-skelter, saying, 'The Lord will provide.' They may have no more than they can do well by."

A silence of displeasure. The conversation was not going as had been intended, and the attackers looked to Mrs. Fotheringham to lead them.

"What do you think of all this?" she asked suddenly, of Mrs. Endecott. "You cannot be in favour of it, we are sure."

Mrs. Endecott was not; Argent and Chrystal had tried to convert her, but she could not execute such a volte-face as that. Argent and Chrystal were, however, the two persons whom she loved best after her Mervyn, and she felt pained when they were insulted. Her hands were trembling, and the tears were in her kindly eyes.

"Apart from its irreligiousness, which I deplore," she said, "we have one serious objection to it. The doctor will explain; I am too agitated."

Dr. Endecott was sitting to the left of

Mrs. Fotheringham, and nearly opposite to Argent, who had placed himself on the further side of his sister-in-law. Everybody's interest increased as the genial doctor began deliberately.

"The new principle seems to be—'Love is enough; therefore law with love is unnecessary, and law without love makes of marriage an untrue unclean thing.' Yes, the heartless marriage may be so, although we have all been trained to believe that its legality gave it a morality; I can understand that, though I thank heaven that I have never experienced it. And the marriage which is only voluntary, and so a true marriage, may be very delightful—while the love lasts. It would, in fact, be perfect in its happiness, if the man's and woman's love could be kept simultaneous. But we know that is generally impossible. And Illegal Marriage stipulates for a separation—not when both have changed, but when one changes. Then comes desertion. I am told that the word desertion is wrong, because each has enough to live comfortably and independently; there can be no economic desertion—true; but we know there is such a thing as desertion of the heart,

and the free marriage aids that. To put the matter personally," said Dr. Endecott, looking straight at his brother, "if Chrystal changes first, she will desert you, however you may suffer; and if you change first, you will desert her, though she may be heartbroken."

Dr. and Mr. Endecott were known to be attached brothers, therefore this address, reproachful without any unkindness, was dramatically interesting to the company. Argent had kept his eyes on the ground, and listened with intent and grave attention; when his elder brother ceased, he raised them and a smile broke over his whole face.

"I do not expect a change," he said, "and I will tell you why. While the New are in so small a minority, it would be difficult for Chrystal or for me to find a better mate than each has in the other; and love does last sometimes, even under the worst of systems." He laid his hand affectionately on his sister-in-law's arm as he thus referred to her and Mervyn. "But change is the law of nature, and constancy can never be more than the exception. And the Free Marriage—which does not aid this fact, as you erroneously say, but which teaches us our duty under it—is

more moral than the Tied Marriage. It will produce more happiness—not less. Is all so smooth with you?" he cried, addressing his hearers generally. "Is it as smooth as you pretend? Olden people, living under the olden system, have you no divorces, no separations, no desertions? no jealousy, no wretchedness? Have you no girls with empty or with aching hearts, wasting their sweetness, yearning for a natural existence? girls who dare not choose and court for themselves, but must wait—and wait—and wait perhaps until they die?" His eyes strayed toward a group of young faces, where Carry's showed pale and tear-stained. "The greatest happiness comes through freedom. The man whose wife is free may not be neglectful; the woman whose husband is free may not be ill-tempered; Chrystal and I will be on our best behaviour." He smiled. And Carry sighed as she thought what Argent Endecott, at his best, would be. "And if her heart should cease to beat with mine, and if she ever tells me she must leave me for another man, I shall be unhappy—" He stopped. "But shall I be as pitiable as the husband whose legally-loved wife forsakes him? He

has the rage of being duped ; his ownership of her is outraged ; but I deny that I shall be 'deserted,' for I shall say she has done right."

"Oh, Mr. Endecott," cried Mrs. Fotheringham, clasping her hands in entreaty, "do be persuaded by me ! Do—do make an honest woman of her, and then we might condone the past and receive her !"

It was so irrelevant, so fatuous, so offensive, yet well-meant ! While Argent hesitated for forbearing words to answer with, little sounds of dissent made themselves heard. It was very well for Mrs. Fotheringham to try to tie him to that Mrs. Dampier, but other ladies had daughters to establish, and Mr. Endecott as a free husband would be more wicked, but would not be quite lost. So they murmured and protested that they never would receive her, and there was a momentary confusion.

"Ladies and gentlemen," said Endecott, rising suddenly to his feet, "as this is positively my last appearance among you, will you allow me to deliver a little lecture upon three types of womanhood ? It will be my farewell to you, and I promise you it shall be short."

The company had been dull before Mr. Endecott came, and the duller because obliged to be lively; he could be exciting, and he could be amusing, and if it was improper it was for the only time. They were no more angered by his outburst than they were angered when Mr. Bouverie scolded them as a congregation in church, both the outburst and the scolding being accepted as a performance for their entertainment. So they settled themselves comfortably in their chairs, and Mrs. Fotheringham gave a gracious assent.

CHAPTER XVI.

ENDECOTT stood facing his audience, as they sat in a semi-circle before him, the matrons complacent, the girls in a flutter of muslin and ribbons and expectation, the gentlemen rather critically disposed. Behind them was the red-bricked house with its flowering creepers, and over all arched the blue sky of July.

“The Three Types of Womanhood we are about to consider, ladies and gentlemen, can be described by the three words:—

SELF-EFFACEMENT, SELF-DEVELOPMENT,
SELF-POSSESSION.

“A hundred years ago, there existed one feminine ideal only, and the female of that epoch was actually what men expected her to

be. She was universally approved. She effaced herself. We find her in the novels 'Clarissa,' 'Pamela,' and 'Sir Charles Grandison,'—a clinging damsel, domestically submissive. She had a low voice. She ate little, for delicacy and languor were interesting; she has been known, however, to eat surreptitiously in her own room when afflicted with a vulgar appetite. She screamed if she saw a mouse and fainted with the ease of much practice. Her handwriting was small, fine, and it slanted—else how could it have looked feminine? she might not stand upright in mental and moral strength, and so the letters that her hand formed must have the same ineptitude. On social occasions, she was treated as though she were decrepit, armed or handed here and there by a man. When musical, she bent forward and embraced her harp, to show at once the contour of her arms and the fondness of her disposition. Her literature was the Cookery-Book and the Bible. Neither her soul nor her body belonged to her: she remained obediently in the religion in which she had been brought up, 'the only good and true religion,' all others leading to damnation; and it was thought shame if she should feel a

preference for any man before the lover had declared himself and the father had consented. She belonged to her parents while single, and to her lord and master afterwards. She might not even give herself away at church, on her wedding-day, but was given away in public recognition of the fact that she was a piece of property passing from one owner to another, handed over by the paternal to the marital. In the married state, her bondage became worse. She was dedicated, from birth, to the Imitation of the Violet:—

‘ Down in a green and shady vale,
A modest violet grew ;
It spread its leaves, and hung its head,
As if to hide from view.’

“ A poor thing, ladies and gentlemen—I am sure you will agree with me—a poor thing ! ”

Thus far, Endecott had had his hearers with him. Smiles were seen on every face.

He resumed.

“ This century-ago ideal, in her entirety, has become extinct. Only a few antiquated Tories cherish her memory regretfully.

“ Fifty years ago began the era of female

self-development, and a growing ideal had to struggle for its existence against the fixed ideal. Then arose discussions as to what was feminine and what was not. The conservative man pointed to the most tightly bound, and said, 'This is the true woman;' so the Chinese says, 'This is the feminine foot,' and when he first sees the feet of our Western women, he shudders, and thinks them so unfeminine. 'Females are naturally dependent, irresolute, feeble-brained; see the evidences of it; they could not be otherwise'—this was the conservative assertion. But it is only natural to the foot—or waist—to be deformed when you deform it; it could not be otherwise then; still, it is an artificially-made foot or waist. And the progressives said, 'We cannot know the real female character until we have loosened some of the restraints.' Little bits of naturalness, peeping out, perplexed the theorist; and the more natural a woman insisted on being, the more unnatural he declared her! 'The sex' was said by him to be inscrutable. Having determined that woman should be angelic, he was shocked to find her human; she was supposed to be so con-

stituted that she had no passions; yet one writer, stumbling nearer to the truth, though he expressed it contumeliously, announced that 'Every woman is a rake at heart!' Similarly, when stockings were first invented, and a presentation-pair was sent to the then Queen of Spain, the indignant reply went back, 'The Queen of Spain has no legs!'" (Laughter from the audience.) "But we have acknowledged since that woman has as many legs as man, and even queens wear stockings now.

"Amid clamour and hatred and abuse, amid confusion of pens and of tongues, amid cries of 'Unsexed!' the New Woman developed herself. The newer type of the two has triumphed. You, ladies"—and he bowed—"are her representatives. May I describe her?"

"Yes, yes," said several voices, and pleased expectancy was general.

"She is taller, larger, healthier; gymnastics and outdoor exercises of sorts have made her blood ruddy and her appetite considerable. She can swim, and has been known to rescue men from drowning. She has even been known to grapple with a burglar!" (Laughter

and smiles.) "But, strange to say, she is still too infirm to open the door for herself when there is a man in the room!" (Smiles.) "Her writing is large and clear. The 'low voice' is no longer 'an excellent thing in woman,' for she appears on platforms and speaks out her mind—sometimes a chaotic mind. She travels. She rides in hansom cabs; and she rides a bicycle, in a skirt. She stands erect and plays the violin. She possesses her own property, whether single or married. She changes freely from one religion to another; she teaches her children that every religion has some good in it, and has proceeded so far in demolishing her own that she pooh-poohs its hell and leaves it only its heaven. As there is just enough of Jupiter left to swear by, so there is just enough of Jehovah left to differ about! A little ashamed of his Biblical barbarism, she has reconstructed him out of her moral consciousness, and has deprived him of so many of his bad qualities that the poor God does not know himself." (Sensation and displeasure.)

"No blasphemy, if you please," said Mrs. Fotheringham.

“Her relations with the other sex are altered; she has pushed her way into the professions, and can do most things that men can do. She is their rival. And one of her detractors, in despair at this aggressiveness of hers, made a bitter parody of the old nursery song:—

‘Where are you going to, my pretty maid?’

‘I’m going to a lecture, sir,’ she said.

‘May I go with you, my pretty maid?’

‘Yes, if you please, kind sir,’ she said.

‘What is the subject, my pretty maid?’

‘The Painless Extinction of Man,’ she said!”

(General laughter.)

“She is now in a position of general approval, though there are still varieties of opinion about her. She is different from the Self-Effacing Woman. But not a natural woman yet. She claims the disposal of her own person—only within legal limits; she still approves the maid who ‘never told her love,’ and when she does tell it—for she does sometimes, as I explained to you last week—she feels very much ashamed. She does not obey her parents, nor her husband; sometimes she rules them; but she obeys the

written and the unwritten laws, she is in servitude to them, and often their victim. Ladies, in the Self-Developed Woman behold yourselves!"

He paused, and dissatisfaction became apparent, expressed in whispers.

"And you think that evolution will cease with your advent? Be not so sure. Already the new is becoming the old. Already there is another comer, and the Self-Possessing Woman steps forward to confront you!"

A gloom settled on some faces, severity on others. Endecott's audience feared he would not cut this part of his lecture short. Only Carry wanted him to go on, and on, and on, for she loved every word he spoke for the sake of the voice that spoke it.

"And now begins again the futile struggle of the old to prevent the new. Again the turmoil, uproar, and obloquy; again articles in newspaper and magazine, wailing, wailing, 'Let each generation be as the last! Let there be nobody new!'

"This latest comer scarcely needs to claim equality with man, she has achieved so much of it; bodily, intellectually, and socially, she *is* his equal. Not a thing made up of tradi-

tions, prejudices, rules, and formulas, but a natural woman and therefore the real woman. She teaches her children that all religions are false and ethically evil; she discards the Bible, dismissing its hell and its heaven with equal contempt. She denies that she has any soul. But she absolutely owns her own personality. I know a lady who, for forty years, has been publicly demanding political freedom, and she has not got it yet; social freedom need not be asked for, it can be taken. And the Newest Woman takes it.

"She cannot be accused of wanting to extinguish man."

"No, indeed," said Mrs. Fotheringham, thinking of Messrs. Yorke, Dampier, and Endecott.

"Competition against him is abhorrent to her; she wants co-operation with him in everything, and everywhere. Life is an ever-recurring experiment, and to make the experiment successful new men and women are required, with new motives, new opinions, new ideals. These men and women have not done away with virtue, but they have enlarged its borders: the old faith is for religion, the new is for science; the old

loyalty is for the Queen, the new is for Humanity; the old patriotism is for one's country, the new is for the world. And with these wider conceptions of duty comes equality, which makes us free and happy.

"Let this century see the last of the old fetishes that men, now dead, set up for their own purposes. In the twentieth century, let the Women of the Future, who are growing up around us, refuse to be threatened with a ghastly hell, or bamboozled with an odious heaven! Let them own themselves; let the shame go, when nothing shameful has been done; let the children of love be welcomed honourably! And remember—for this is sooth—she who would be free must free herself!

"And now, ladies and gentlemen," concluded Endecott, with a forgiving smile, "we are quits. You have insulted me, and I have instructed you. I wish you all good-bye."

He saluted the company with a bow, and walked away.

The best beauty of a human being is brought to him and her by happy love, and that beauty was Chrystal's now. She had conducted her own life, and compassed her

own happiness: she had groped alone through the mysteries of childhood and girlhood ; she had uprisen from her misery at Merlemere, and made a happier home at Clyst ; she had deserved Argent's love, and had asked him to live with her. Every right was hers, therefore, to her enjoyment. She understood, at last, what it is to be enamoured. The beautiful old words, par-amour and love-child, rose up in her memory during those days, and repeated themselves in her heart. Now she was to have that rapturous joy of womanhood, a par-amour ! that crowning glory of motherhood, a love-child !

She stood by Endecott's side, in the tiny Nutshell drawing-room, just before they started for their honeymoon.

"A child of convenience—a child of maternity—a child of love !" Thus mused Chrystal, as she kissed Etta and Vera, and, in imagination, saw a little Argent playing with them and being petted by them.

Then Argent Endecott and Chrystal Endecott departed. And thus began the Free Marriage of the Newest Man and Woman.

THE END

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